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SCRUTINY

A Quarterly Review

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SCRUTINY

A Quarterly Review

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REFLECTIONS ON THE MILTON CONTROVERSY

DESPITE uneasy truces and despite the desultory nature of the campaign, guerilla warfare rather than pitched battle, no one can fail to see that the war between Criticism and Scholarship still continues. It is clear, too, that no corner of the field is more exposed or more hotly contested than that occupied by Milton. This does not mean, of course, that it is a deserted corner: the scholars, particularly, still tramp about in it and many of them, by dint of ignoring the shrapnel-bursts around them, have contrived to behave as though nothing were amiss. Such self-possession can hardly be commanded by anyone who, like myself, has tried to lend an honest ear to both sides, and it is bound to be wtih a good deal of reluctance that he ventures out under the bullets. At the same time there would seem to be almost an obligation upon neutrals who are interested in Milton to come forward with as honest a report on the battle as they can presently make, rather than to retire into non-committal security. It is many years since Dr. Tillyard found it 'extremely salutary that the present age should have begun questioning [Milton's] right to eminence' [1] but I think the remark still epitomizes the attitude of most of us who, while being outside the controversy, are necessarily implicated in it and concerned to see it argued to its conclusion. And this being so it can only be with regret that we observe the tendency among so many writers to presume that it is, in fact, concluded, that the scholars have won a resounding victory, and that the critics' attempts to analyse some of Milton's deficiences, always wrong-headed, have now been revealed as disreputable also. To shy away from an argument is not to win it and, more important still, is bound to leave the bewildered onlooker (that is the student) in a greater state of bewilderment than ever. Yet in a matter like this no one has a stronger right than the student to be considered. Having watched several groups of students both in England and in Canada torn this way and that in their attempts to form an estimate of Milton I am convinced that unless the argument is allowed to run its course, unless it is persevered with responsibly and in the open, it can be of no use to them. If it is allowed to go underground they are left only with a dim sense of taboos and smouldering resentments and may easily conclude, in self-defence, that the assessment of this poet is an improper activity, something that decent people don't talk about. Indeed I believe this attitude is already distressingly general—distressingly, because surely nothing could be more pernicious in the field of literary criticism.

[1] *Milton* (London 1946), p. 355.

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As I say it seems to be assumed that the battle has been won, with the scholars triumphant, and since this is so I want here to consider a number of points from the vindications that have been advanced on Milton's behalf. To consider every vindication in detail is obviously quite impracticable in an essay of this kind, but I hope that if a few key-arguments are carefully scrutinized, and found wanting, the effect will be to encourage a student to review the whole controversy without his snatching at the paralysing assumption that it is all over and already, seen in historical perspective, rather unreal. In my eyes there is nothing unreal about it and indeed many of the issues which it raises seem to me so vital to a healthy sort of criticism that to refuse to acknowledge them points presumptively to disingenuousness. In this instance I am prepared, with the lawyers, to equate *suppressio veri* and *expressio falsi*. I am of course well aware that to join issue with the defenders of Milton, even in the interests of a common settlement, is likely to be misinterpreted. There are always a few individuals who, having a vested interest in the poet, and one that is peripheral or bigoted enough to be insecure, will cry out at once that I am preaching sedition. To make allowances for such reactions is beyond the powers of any critic (to say nothing of his patience) and I shall not attempt it. On the other hand I am loth to agree with the Fool that truth's a dog must to kennel and I feel sure that the author of *Areopagitica* would himself have approved of any attempt to pursue the whole question of his poetry in a candid and forthright way. The jealous spirit which in our time so balefully presides over literary arguments is a grasping demon and if it is encouraged it is bound in the end to strangle all our attempts at judgment. Writing recently in the *Review of English Studies*[2] Mr. J. B. Leishman had occasion to remark that of the poems contained in *Englands Helicon* 'not more than twenty, and probably rather less, would positively require to be included in an anthology which sought to represent Elizabethan lyrical poetry at its best'. There is nothing very disturbing about so sane and indeed generous an estimate; what is disturbing is the fact that the writer found it necessary at the same time to declare (twice) that he is 'a man of many crotchets'. This suggests plainly enough the stage at which, unless we are prepared to be less egotistic and sulky in our judgments, criticism is destined to arrive. *Any* fresh judgment, however reasonable, will have to be proffered as the quirk of amiable and irresponsible eccentricity, lest it should call up anathema from some somnolent authority who once ventured a more orthodox opinion, and in course of time the whole notion of a normative judgment will disappear, to be replaced by heaven knows what elaborate and apologetic system of hypothetical assumptions, putative rebuttals and quasi-conclusions. In many ways we are well along that road already. It is one that I do not propose to follow here. I shall make my points as trenchantly as I can, trenchancy being a

[2]New Series, Vol. II, pp. 381-2.

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virtue that argument can ill dispense with, but I shall make them without animosity, in the hope that if they are provocative it will rather be of a rejoinder than of a spasm of resentment. I make no pretence to the scholarship of the writers from whom my extracts will be taken, but since the extracts present the findings of criticism rather than those of scholarship I shall rely on the common right of all readers of Milton to dispute those findings.

To begin with a generality we might say that it is no disparagement of the work of critics like F. R. Leavis and A. J. A. Waldock to claim that, if to-day their verdict on *Paradise Lost* as a poem at best only partially successful seems irrefutable, that is partly because those who admire the poem have done so little to meet this verdict in anything like a cogent way. It seems to me that between them the two critics mentioned have established a quite formidable case against Milton's claim to pre-eminence, and that it can only be a false buoyancy which leads apologists for Milton to expect (as many of them appear to) that vague commendations of the epic will be enough to divert the critical reader from that case. Milton has, it is true, a customary or prescriptive title in this matter—as I recall Peacock even went so far as to call him our greatest poet—but in the field of criticism custom has no force whatever when it has to be set against demonstration and convincing argument. Neither Dr. Leavis nor the late Professor Waldock has, after all, branded Milton as worthless. What they have done is to draw attention to certain positive weaknesses, both in the verse and in the general structure or conception of his epic. If my own experience is at all representative it seems to me likely that what the general reader now awaits, though perhaps with less and less expectancy, is an equally pertinent rejoinder from the other side, a persuasive critical demonstration of the merits of Milton's verse and an account of the structure of his epic which will reveal such strength and propriety in it as to set Waldock's criticisms at a substantial discount.

In Professor Waldock's case, though it is now five years since his book appeared, no real rejoinder has been entered. So far as I know the only advocate of Milton who has had occasion to deal with *Paradise Lost and its Critics* is Dr. Tillyard, in his *Studies in Milton*, but his treatment of it is far too indirect to be accepted as a careful refutation. At least this seems to me true of the essay on *The Crisis in Paradise Lost* where, I suppose, he has Professor Waldock's arguments most in mind. Elsewhere he cites the book, as often as not, merely to corroborate minor interpretations of his own and, though he does set Waldock right on the intention of six lines in Book III (p. 56), and disagrees with one of his remarks about Satan (p. 58), he seems hardly concerned with the significance of the general thesis of the other book and the gravity of its implications. Only once, in commenting on a passage in Book IX (pp. 28-9), does he draw near to this central thesis, the confusion and inconsistency that vitiates the poem, and here it is only to set the criticism, having agreed with it, discreetly on one side. He admits

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that in the passage in question 'we have to do with a discrepancy with which Milton was powerless to deal except by faking', a remark that paraphrases Waldock's comment on it, but adds at once, with a startling blend of haste and complacency, 'And if we follow the lead of the poetry, we can only admire him for doing as well as he does'. This is not refutation; it is not even disagreement. Yet surely some attempt to come to terms with Waldock's objection, not only to this passage but to the whole poem, is necessary if Dr. Tillyard's position as an advocate is not to be precarious? He himself speaks highly of *Paradise Lost and its Critics* in the same volume and in this he will surely have most readers on his side. Where the reader and he part company is, I think, in his assumption that Waldock's findings can be somehow left in abeyance, not directly challenged but tacitly and rather stealthily encroached upon. The reader's retort is likely to be that, Waldock's book being what it is, he accepts its criticisms of the poem with very few reservations, and that if this is ill-advised it is for the admirers of Milton to show him why, just as it has been for them to show why Dr. Leavis's earlier criticisms of Milton's verse should not be accepted.

In Dr. Leavis's case the position is different, at least to the extent that refutation has been attempted. It is difficult to feel, however, that the attempts have done much to diminish the assent with which, after fifteen years, one still reads his essay. Other writers who, in his own phrase 'came out' against Milton during the 'thirties have, for one reason or another, come to seem much less persuasive than they may then have seemed. Ezra Pound's vigorous attack, in the course of which he spoke of 'the donkey-eared Milton', of 'the coarseness of his mentality' and of 'the abominable dog biscuit of Milton's rhetoric', now appears not merely cantankerous but vague; Professor Dobrée's praise of Dryden at Milton's expense has been persuasively countered by Sir Herbert Grierson; Middleton Murry's invocation of certain passages in Keats's letters against Milton has met with objections from Dr. Tillyard which one feels should be accepted; and T. S. Eliot, referring to his own earlier deprecations, has lately been at some pains to point out, in the words of *Prufrock*, 'That is not what I meant at all; That is not it, at all'. But the chapter in *Revaluation* still holds its ground and no amount of harping on its over-sanguine opening can alter the fact that what follows is a reasoned and, in the absence of confutation, compelling analysis of deficiency. Indeed even to speak of the opening as 'over-sanguine' may be a distortion. 'Milton's displacement' may perhaps, in view of the tenacity with which his admirers have rallied to his assistance, be a little optimistic; but 'displacement' is surely a relative term and to accept it, as many readers seem to have done, as a casting out of Milton from even the lower ranks of poetry is simply absurd. Here again an argument cannot be neutralized if we are only concerned with a parody of it. To disagree with Peacock it is hardly necessary to set Milton lower than Cowley or Gray or Rupert Brooke.

I say that Milton's admirers have rallied to his assistance and

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it is a fact that they have done so in such numbers as to give, at first sight, an impression of strength. On examination, however, it seems to be no more than that—an impression rather than a proof. In a case such as this mere numbers prove nothing, as my mention of Ezra Pound and the rest will already have suggested, and one has only to take particular and *seriatim* stock of the defences to see how vulnerable many of the arguments upon which they rely turn out to be. It is plain of course that at the lowest level—Pearsall Smith for instance—they reveal only a rather idiotic self-assurance (something from which even a co-belligerent like C. S. Lewis has felt it necessary to dissociate himself). But even where the writer avoids this kind of irresponsibility we find, I think invariably, that in at least one respect or on at least one occasion he has gone out of his way to advertise his own personal unfitness for the task he has proposed to himself. Rajan attempts to answer Dr. Leavis's case without once mentioning him, and thus as it were deliberately confines himself to what is vague and general, and C. S. Lewis, though he at least has courtesy enough to recognize his opponent, after finding himself obliged to concede that Dr. Leavis's account of Milton's verse is much the same as that which he would himself present, concludes that between them there is only a temperamental difference, one 'loving' what the other 'hates'. The implications for criticism of such an admission seem to have escaped him altogether; or if they have not at least he has refused to pause over them. These are general objections and may seem vague, but I think they are just and that they tend to be corroborated by the particular lapses that disfigure the work of both critics. Lewis writes of Homer—

> 'Once the diction has been established it works of itself. Almost anything the poet wants to say, has only to be turned into this orthodox and ready-made diction and it become poetry. "Whatever Miss T. eats turns into Misss T".'[3]

—after which it is something of an effort to feel that he can have a very profound conception of poetry, and Rajan's examination of Milton's verse keeps turning into Sitwellian clap-trap, as here:

> 'Thus *m* and *n* occur thirteen times in the first four lines and on all but two of these occasions they occur in conjunction with an *i* or an *o*. Such combinations backed by the predominant current of meaning convey irresistibly the terror of Satan's downfall.[4]

I do not myself believe that 'style' (even Homer's) can be hypostatized like this, treated as though it were a mould into which thoughts and feelings can be poured and then turned out like jellies as poetry, nor do I find terror implicit in a conjunction of m's, n's,

[3] *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London 1942), p. 23.
[4] *Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth Century Reader* (London 1947), p. 113.

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i's and o's, and when a critic's attention is so relaxed that he can countenance either proposition it is without enthusiasm that I find myself awaiting the value-judgments that he will offer. In fact, however, both writers tend to eschew value-judgments of a direct kind, and evidently feel that to explain *why* a poet wrote as he did is all that a critic can attempt. Yet the austerity of this view, and the propriety of their explanations, is (as usual in such cases) continually threatened by their own relish for Milton's verse and by the value-judgments which this relish implies, and at times the two contentions—(i) that if Milton's verse is limited it is limited by the conception of poetry that prevailed in his time and (ii) that his verse is not limited—become hopelessly overlaid. It seems impossible that unprejudiced readers should be impressed by arguments where the basic assumptions are as hazy as this, and obvious that the haziness arises, not from any vital concern about the poetry, but from a desire to vindicate the individual, John Milton, as though he were a personal friend—that is, as it might be with a friend, by deliberately or unconsciously distracting attention from his faults. But it was those very faults with which Dr. Leavis was concerned, and no rebuttal which is chary of a meticulous consideration of them can properly be said to have 'answered' his criticisms. And I think that here Dr. Leavis has an added advantage over his opponents in that he himself, as in the chapter called *Mr. Eliot and Milton* in *The Common Pursuit*, has demonstrated his readiness to deal with a counter-argument in a very close and specific way, point by point as it were. In the light of this it seems the more significant that his own arguments have received no comparable treatment nor, with one possible exception, even an attempt at it.[5]

In offering these objections to defences of Milton's verse I have admittedly so far made little mention of the two writers who are probably by virtue of a special concern with the poet or general eminence in the field of seventeenth-century scholarship, most often regarded by the public as his most indomitable champions: I mean Dr. Tillyard and Sir Herbert Grierson. Dr. Leavis has himself dealt with these two advocates of Milton and it would be impertinent for one outside the controversy to repeat his replies.[6] There are, however, perhaps two points which a general reader like myself may be allowed to make, points which must have occurred to other readers in going through the comments of Dr. Tillyard and Sir Herbert Grierson, and if only to suggest that the objections one feels to the work of Rajan and Lewis have their parallel in the case of these

[5]The possible exception is Sir Herbert Grierson—see *Milton and Wordsworth* (Cambridge 1937) pp. 125-131—though it will be observed that he avoids citing such remarks as '[Milton] exhibits a feeling *for* words rather than a capacity for feeling *through* words' and the converse applied to Shakespeare: 'the total effect is as if words as words withdrew themselves from the focus of our attention and we were directly aware of a tissue of feelings and perceptions'.
[6]See the essay 'In Defence of Milton' in *The Common Pursuit*.

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apologists also they seem worth making here. I should like to consider a short passage from each of the two.

The first passage comes from an essay on *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* by Dr. Tillyard. He is considering Milton's use of words in these poems as it is represented in a typical couplet from *L'Allegro*:

> 'Apart from a couple of minor syntactical difficulties the language is extremely lucid. This does not mean that the poems are shallow. Take the couplet
>
> Hard by, a Cottage chimney smokes,
> From betwixt two aged Okes.
>
> This is simple language, but as poetry the lines are not negligible. We all know that cottage, but the picture we each make is different from our neighbour's. And it is Milton who makes us our picture. His outline compels us to fill in the detail. His means—and I doubt whether they can be called simple—are drastic economy of detail and musical suggestion. The heavy beat of the first line has nothing to do with the smoke; it suggests squatness and the quality of being solidly based, in the cottage. Statement and rhythm are doing different jobs of work. The rhythm of the second line rises a little at the end—the oaks are tall—and has something carelessly solid in it—the oaks know their own dignity. (I am well aware of the dangers of talking in this strain; I merely wish to say with some emphasis that the couplet has substance.)[7]

Here surely most readers must have felt that for one 'well aware of the dangers of talking in this strain' Dr. Tillyard has been uncommonly reckless. In what sense the rhythm of a line may be said to have 'something carelessly solid in it', and indeed in what sense *rhythm* may be said to *rise,* is difficult to determine, and when these assertions are applied to an unusually metrical, trochaic line like 'From betwixt two aged Okes' they seem even more meaningless. Whatever 'emphasis' the comments involve is surely hopelessly false, and it would seem from the writer's own exculpatory afterthought that he is himself at any rate partly aware of their falsity. But even if we set aside these remarks about rhythm, and the dubious procedure followed in presenting them (assertion to persuade, followed by retraction so as to remain uncommitted), is there anything else in the comment that deserves to be called critical? Look at the other means that Milton is supposed to be using, 'drastic economy of detail'. As Dr. Tillyard puts it he implies that there is something subtly artistic in Milton's use of bare outlines in his picture here. He seems to me to be saying that the couplet is good because, being not quite sufficient in itself, it obliges us to enter into its sense and add to it; and his approach ('it is Milton who makes us make our picture') plainly suggests that we are

[7] *The Miltonic Setting* (Cambridge 1938), p. 9.

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to give due credit to the poet for making us use our imagination in this way. Yet what status as criticism, when we pause over it for a moment like this, can the argument claim? Setting aside the question whether we do as a matter of fact 'fill in the detail' of the scene for ourselves as we read, and disregarding the assertion, which depends upon it, that 'the picture we each make is different from our neighbour's'—assuming, that is, for the moment that these things do happen as Dr. Tillyard says they do—to what extent can a claim for dexterity in the poet be founded upon them? I submit that in so far as these visualizations do take place as one reads the couplet they have to be attributed simply to a general property of language, and even of single words, and that to use them as evidence for poetic ability, as *positive* evidence, is simply perverse. When I. A. Richards says that 'the more simple the object contemplated the more varied the responses will be which can be expected from it' [8] he offers a statement which, whether true or not, is not in itself absurd. But to twist such a statement as Dr. Tillyard does here, to sustain a value-judgment, is to invite absurdity, for one begins then to appraise a poem in terms of what its author has *not* put into it and can feel free to claim that any simple line (even those in Dr. Johnson's 'As with my hat upon my head I walk'd along the Strand') is a masterpiece of implication, inviting the reader to 'fill in the detail'. Literary criticism is admittedly not an exact science but it is not, I hope, as bedevilled as this.

It is only natural that an extract of this kind should suggest certain general reflections on the type of defence that has been tendered to Milton but perhaps it will be best if I defer these until the second extract, from Sir Herbert Grierson, has been given. It is taken from *Milton and Wordsworth* and relates to the first four books of *Paradise Lost*:

> 'In these books one "stroke", as Addison would call it, of creative and surprising genius follows another—Satan and the angels prostrate on the floor of Hell, Satan's dialogue with Beelzebub, his progress across the burning marle, . . . the rousing of the angels, and that tremendous "stroke" which one might hardly have expected from Milton, Satan shaken with remorse as he surveys the fallen followers of his pride:
>
> > Thrice he assay'd, and thrice in spite of scorn
> > Tears such as angels weep burst forth; at last
> > Words interwoven with sighs found out their way.
>
> Is there even in Shakespeare a greater moment? And Shakespeare might have marred it by a touch of bombast or wit'.[9]

The slighting reference to Shakespeare here is no doubt intended to be provocative, but I think it is clear too that Sir Herbert's

[8] *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London 1938), p. 9.
[9] *Milton and Wordsworth*, p. 107.

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question is a perfectly honest one and that it is intended to make a quite serious comparison. Yet how many readers will grant the comparison? For myself I am quite unable to, and I am bold enough to doubt whether others familiar with the two poets will not feel the same. Two fairly obvious points about any such 'stroke' in Shakespeare at once suggest themselves. First, I believe that in Shakespeare a 'stroke' of this kind would usually and perhaps invariably involve distinctively *poetic* means, so that the resultant effect would be inseparable not only from the statement contained in the words chosen but from their connotations also—consider for example the force of the simile, at once enhancing and ironic, in

> If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there,
> That, like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
> Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioli:
> Alone I did it.

Secondly, I feel that in Shakespeare the effect would often be to concentrate a whole mass of impressions we had already received and bring them poignantly and vividly home to us—as in Lear's

> Do not laugh at me;
> For, as I am a man, I think this lady
> To be my child Cordelia.

But Milton in the lines quoted is really doing neither of these things. In the first place we have only just met the Satan of the poem, so that for all we know it may be Milton's intention to present him as lachrymose: the poetic *context* does nothing to make his tears either moving or wonderful. Moreover, as I shall show in a minute, even if we were reading the poem for the second time, so that Satan's weeping could be more imaginatively related to the rest of his history, we should probably lose in another way what we had gained in this. In the second place there is nothing in the poetic effect of the lines that can be compared with Coriolanus's 'like an eagle in a dove-cote', or even with the simple delicacy of the counterpointing of 'lady' and 'child' in the example from *King Lear*. Someone may indeed perhaps point to 'Tears such as angels weep' as being in its way an equivalent for these Shakespearean effects (there is certainly nothing else to point to) but will such a claim bear examination? Sir Herbert himself does seem to assume that the phrase is a touch of sublimity and that Milton wants us to feel how precious celestial tears must be. But if we had been through the poem once we should know how frequently Milton strays from his main themes to tell us about the substance and properties of angels and we might well feel that these words contained only a simple prosaic qualification—'the tears that angels, like men, can weep (for they can)' rather than 'celestial tears'. Thus if in fact we were re-reading the poem we might on the one hand have the advantage of seeing Satan's weeping as a striking variation from his habitual demeanour but on the other hand our reaction to the phrase describing his tears would almost certainly be much cooler

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and less immediate than Sir Herbert would appear to allow. The definitional sense of the phrase would have shrivelled its connotations of sublimity and we should be able to see how little there actually is in common between it and the other simile in *Coriolanus*. Though it is disagreeable to have to say so it seems to me that Sir Herbert here seems almost idolatrously partial to Milton and rather insensitive to Shakespeare. There are at best only one or two 'strokes' in *Paradise Lost* that can be compared with Shakespeare like this, and perhaps only one: the four magnificent lines (two of which, by the way, Addison wanted to omit) with which it ends.

The two points to which I have been leading up and which I think these two extracts may suffice to confirm can now be stated.

The first point concerns the comparison with Shakespeare. Anyone who has really read the essay on Milton's verse in *Revaluation* will have seen that it is this comparison that Dr. Leavis is chiefly concerned to make, and they will have inferred that a good part of his intention in writing as he did was to question the loose bracketing of the two poets as though they were pretty well equally balanced when measured by the quality of the poetry that they wrote. It is true that many of Milton's defenders have tried to suggest that it was really Donne who was involved in Dr. Leavis's comparison but—since he only refers to Donne once, quoting him to illustrate 'the Shakespearean usage of English'—this is so patent an attempt to shift the basis of the argument to their own advantage that with the ordinarily attentive reader it is bound to defeat its own purpose. If then much of the debate is really rooted in the comparison with Shakespeare it is safe to say that, in order to yield to a critic soliciting his agreement, a reader will demand from him at least as much sensitivity to Shakespeare's verse as to Milton's. And when he finds, among those repudiating Dr. Leavis's arguments, even so judicious a Miltonist as Sir Herbert Grierson falling short in this sensitivity he is surely justified in wondering to what extent those arguments have been properly understood—to what extent there *is* an argument, and not simply an instinctive response to what is vaguely sensed as a threat. Moreover when he has not only the analysis offered in the essay but also the testimony of a convinced admirer of Milton like Mr. C. S. Lewis to assure him of Dr. Leavis's sensitivity to *Milton's* verse his wonder may quite properly begin to harden into a conviction that Dr. Leavis is a more dependable guide than any of the opposing voices. I cannot see what, unless it be prejudice, there is to bar such a conclusion.

Again (and this is my second point) when we come upon an appreciative but sophistical commentary on Milton's writing like the one I have quoted from Dr. Tillyard (it is not the only example of its kind, though admittedly striking) we must surely begin to wonder why such an account should ever have been conceived. The fault does not lie with Milton, for there are undoubtedly a number of passages in his work—passages where, as Dr. Leavis has said, 'the verse glows with an unusual life'—that offer themselves for critical approval. Some of these have been dealt with by Dr. Leavis

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and that there are others he himself would be, I imagine, the first to grant. I shall take two that seem to me appropriate. Consider for instance (though here we have something rather different from a glow of vitality) the passage in the first book in which we are shown Satan calling upon his fallen host to arise:

> Nathless he so endur'd, till on the Beach
> Of that inflamed Sea, he stood and call'd
> His Legions, Angel Forms, who lay intrans't
> Thick as Autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks
> In *Vallombrosa,* where th' *Etrurian* shades
> High overarch't imbowr; or scattered sedge
> Afloat, when with fierce Winds *Orion* arm'd
> Hath vex'd the Red-Sea Coast, whose waves orethrew
> *Busiris* and his *Memphian* Chivalrie,
> While with perfidious hatred they pursu'd
> The Sojourners of *Goshen,* who beheld
> From the safe shore their floating Carkases
> And broken Chariot Wheels, so thick bestrown
> Abject and lost lay these, covering the Flood,
> Under amazement of their hideous change. (299-313)

This, with its encrustation of similes, seems to me characteristic of Milton. But the similes are not merely encrusted—they are organized with extraordinary skill. He begins simply, by likening the fallen angels lying on the lake to autumn leaves thickly scattered on water flowing darkly under trees. Then, keeping the core of this image but altering its surface slightly, he compares them to sedge floating on the sea. With a smoothness that precludes the suspicion on our part that our attention is being manipulated we are told that it is the Red Sea on which the sedge is floating, and this diplomatic shift allows us to move on naturally and unobtrusively to the recollection from the book of Exodus, the destruction of the army with which Pharoah was pursuing the children of Israel. And suddenly, seeing now the wreckage and flotsam of the Egyptian army on the surface of the sea, we realize what has happened, how beautifully the images have been turned back upon themselves and resolved, leaving us back where we started, with the picture of myriads of soldier-like forms stretched in defeat on the sea of fire. No apologetic qualifications need be resorted to by the critic who claims that such a passage is impressively contrived, and it seems to me that even a critic who claimed that there were few more skilful handlings of simile in English poetry might find many readers prepared to allow his claim. On the other hand, if it was a specifically rhythmical effect that Dr. Tillyard wished to adduce in Milton's favour, he might well have had recourse to such a passage as this, from Book II, where the rhythm and movement incontestably *do* contribute to the meaning:

> At last his Sail-broad Vannes
> He spreads for flight, and in the surging smoak
> Uplifted spurns the ground, thence many a League

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> As in a cloudy Chair ascending rides
> Audacious, but that seat soon failing, meets
> A vast vacuitie: all unawares
> Fluttring his pennons vain plumb down he drops
> Ten thousand fadom deep . . . (927-934)

This is not, however, the procedure that he adopts. Instead of taking (as we should expect him to take) an unusually successful passage, and demonstrating its merits, he takes a quite ordinary passage and tries to squeeze out some kind of virtue from it. I may say in all seriousness that I appreciate his difficulty. Dr. Leavis's criticisms were not directed against particular passages but against the general run of the verse, the Miltonic average so to speak, and since this is so the critic who adduces one or two demonstrably good passages can hardly feel that he has disposed of those criticisms. It seems to me that Dr. Tillyard has this fact in mind, for whereas in his treatment of *Paradise Lost* in an early book like *Milton* he did not attempt demonstration, and was content merely to throw out assertions about the quality of some passages ('the incomparable description in Book Eleven of the corruption of eternal spring', for instance), in his later books (my extract comes, it will be remembered, from *The Miltonic Setting*) he has tried to deal analytically with particular excerpts—even, as we see, from the minor poems. And nobody could deny that in the example I have given he has chosen to deal with an average rather than an exceptional couplet. But to what effect? The writer who found it 'extremely salutary' that Milton's eminence should be questioned appears now, in the exaggeration and speciousness of his defences, a resolute bardolater, with an itch to prove that there is 'substance' everywhere in Milton. So invidious an impression is obviously unfair and in reading paragraphs in his writings which seem, like that I have quoted, to insist upon it—as also in reading a passage like the one I have quoted from Rajan—I find myself asking whether these aberrations would not have been avoided if the writers had taken more careful stock of the nature of the adverse judgments with which, however remotely, they were engaged. If Milton's average *is* a rather dull one, if we have to stretch and strain in order to pretend otherwise, would it not be better to admit it and pass on? When one turns up Dr. Leavis's essay again one is often surprised, after this wild championing, to find him speaking of 'the consummate art of *Lycidas*', the 'exquisite achievement' of the songs in *Comus*, quoting as a 'felicity' Tennyson's phrase about Milton's 'God-gifted organ voice', and analysing passages from *Paradise Lost* to illustrate what, at his best, Milton can do. Yet in the context of the essay these things are not at all surprising—seem indeed, to judge by results, to go quite unheeded. I am not of course denying that the general effect of the essay is critical—adversely critical, that is. What I am trying to suggest is that the criticisms which it offers are particular and definite, and that it is in no sense the sort of baby-plus-bathwater throw-out that would account for the overwrought

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loyalty with which defenders of the poet have so often attempted to answer it. And here my two points seem to me to converge: to what extent *is* there an argument? to what extent have Milton's advocates understood the case against him? to what extent are their wilder defences simply the result of flurry and misunderstanding? When I regret the lack of a meticulous and specific consideration of Dr. Leavis's case from the other side I am not, then, I believe, demanding from his opponents more than would seem to be required of them already by the nature of disputation itself. Had there been such a reply in the past, disputing what was disputable, conceding what had to be conceded, the argument could have been a very different affair, a matter of critical co-operation towards a wholly useful end rather than an occasion for polemic and hyperbole. Far from cowing the student into a nervous silence it might instead have given him a truly just and sensitive attitude to Milton, and shown him also the sort of discovery, fresh in each age, that literary criticism can achieve.

I suppose it is a little late in the day to be pointing all this out. But my excuse must be that the transition from the controversy itself, such as it was, to the present situation, in which most Miltonists are prepared to close their eyes and behave as though it had never occurred, has been a gradual one, and that only lately has it become patent enough to make necessary the sort of caveat I have tried to develop here. Besides Dr. Tillyard's *Studies in Milton* I am thinking particularly of two other recent publications in the field of Milton criticism, the one a reprint of the 1645 edition of the minor poems with appended 'essays in analysis' by Cleanth Brooks and John Edward Hardy and the other a symposium, evidently with some pretensions to being thought comprehensive, of articles on the poet by modern critics. No adverse critic has found his way into the symposium, nor is there any mention of the controversy in Brooks and Hardy's volume. Indeed of all the writers who have probed for limitations in Milton's poetry these two most recent critics refer only to T. S. Eliot—the reference, in itself very brief, being to his 'retraction' rather than to anything written earlier. With Brooks and Hardy's own sort of criticism, and its reliance upon formal 'patterns', 'resurrection images' and the New English Dictionary, I am not here concerned. What does concern me is that their book (like the others) is intended for students. I have already observed that in my eyes the premature termination of the controversy is an unnecessary victimization of the student, something that is bound to leave him perplexed and uneasy rather than enlightened; but this new tendency, as it were, to censor any murmuring against Milton's reputation, to withhold from the student opinions that might conflict with those of a teacher whose regard for Milton bordered on adulation, is much more serious, and even a little sinister. In saying this I am not of course merely agreeing with Coleridge that 'the very act of dissenting from established opinions must generate habits precursive to the love of freedom'—though that is an opinion which, in my view, experience

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tends to verify. Rather I am objecting to the introduction into the sphere of education of a kind of bias and authoritarianism which to anyone, like myself, engaged in teaching can only appear vicious. With Milton, I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, nor yet an opinion which depends upon a selection of all the relevant facts. Where that selection is the outcome of imposition rather than choice, moreover, it surely needs to be even more peremptorily condemned. The controversy may indeed, as it stands, be a victimization of the student but to make this an excuse for further victimization, by neglecting to mention it or hugger-muggering it, is quite indefensible. Is the aim of our education henceforth to be conformity? And, if so, conformity to what? I ask, with Juvenal, *quis custodiet ipsos custodes*?

JOHN PETER.

THE NOVEL AS DRAMATIC POEM (VII):

THE RAINBOW (III)

AS, in the child Ursula, the new life-cycle begins, we feel it at first mainly as something that happens in the father's. Anna's absorption in her baby will be followed by her absorption in turn in its successors; it marks her lapsing from the foreground of the drama; she is the serene mother in the background. But between Will and his first child there is a very special relation.

> 'From the first, the baby stirred in the young father a deep, strong emotion he dared scarcely acknowledge, it was so strong and came out of the dark of him. When he heard the child cry, a terror possessed him, because of the answering echo from the unfathomed distances in himself. Must he know in himself such distances, perilous and imminent?'

The rendering of Will's awe, terror and delight is very intensely Laurentian. What we have in these pages, at the opening of Chapter VIII ('The Child'), is something more than the imaginative divination of a young father's response. It is dramatically appropriate; but we cannot help feeling that it comes with peculiar directness from the centre of Lawrence himself. Here is that Lawrence whose genius is to be the antithesis of the inventor of the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos. It is, in such places as these that we realize with special force how inseparable from such creativeness as Lawrence's, how essentially *of* so un-Flaubertian an art, is the un-Flaubertian attitude towards life; the reverence that, in its responsiveness, is courage and vitality. And as we read we tell ourselves that certainly there *is* something that is neither the optimistic enlightenment detested by the author of *The Cocktail*

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Party or, on the other hand, the spirituality of Baudelaire; those are not exhaustive alternatives:

> 'One evening, suddenly, he saw the tiny living thing rolling naked in the mother's lap, and he was sick, it was so utterly helpless and vulnerable and extraneous; in a world of hard surfaces and varying altitudes, it lay vulnerable and naked at every point. Yet it was quite blithe. And yet, in its blind, awful crying was there not the blind, far-off terror of its own nakedness, the terror of being so utterly delivered over, helpless at every point. He could not bear to hear it crying. His heart strained and stood on guard against the whole universe.
>
> 'But he waited for the dread of these days to pass; he saw the joy coming. He saw the lovely, creamy, cool little ear of the baby, a bit of dark hair rubbed to a bronze floss, like bronze-dust. And he waited, for the child to become his, to look at him and answer him.
>
> 'It had a separate being, but it was his own child. His flesh and blood vibrated to it. He caught the baby to his breast with his passionate, clapping laugh. And the infant knew him.
>
> 'As the newly-opened, newly-dawned eyes looked at him, he wanted them to perceive him, to recognize him. Then he was verified. The child knew him, a queer contortion of laughter came on its face for him. He caught it to his breast, clapping with a triumphant laugh'.

The pages that follow give us the child's dawning consciousness, its growing awareness of the world, its development into a person; all the freshness of experience in the beginning life. And here too, as again and again in *The Rainbow* with respect to other things, we find ourselves asking whether *that* has ever been done so well by any other writer. An experience, with its wonders and shocks and pains, becomes more and more complex for Ursula we realize that the theme now is coming to have its main force in her. Yet for a while the father might seem to be retaining his old proportionate claim on our attention; the part played by her in *his* life to be weighing fairly evenly against the part played by him in hers. Will's abnormal intensity of relation with his daughter is an outcome of the failure between him and Anna; in it the drama of the second generation continues. But we very soon settle down to the recognition that the consequences for Ursula matter more, in the sense that she, now, represents the major developing interest.

'She was wakened too soon': what is stated here summarizes what we see, and take the vibration of, in the direct concrete presentment. And as the too intense and rousing interchange between father and child is given us it is in the child's experience that we find ourselves the more inwardly and respondingly.

> 'The child ran about absorbed in life, quiet, full of amusement. She did not notice things, nor changes, nor alterations. One day she would find daisies in the grass, another day apple-blossoms would be sprinkled white on the ground,

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and she would run among it, for pleasure because it was there Yet again the birds would be pecking at the cherries, her father would throw cherries down from the tree all round her on the garden. Then the fields were full of hay.

'She did not remember what had been nor what would be, the outside things were there each day. She was always herself, the world outside was accidental. Even her mother was accidental to her: a condition that happened to endure.

'Only her father occupied any permanent position in the childish consciousness. When he came back she remembered vaguely how he had gone away, when he went away she knew vaguely that she must wait for his coming back. Whereas her mother, returning from an outing, merely became present, there was no reason for connecting her with some previous departure.

'The return or the departure of the father was the one event which the child remembered. When he came something woke up in her, some yearning. She knew when he was out of joint or irritable or tired: then she was uneasy, she could not rest'.

The consequences for Ursula of her father's making on her something too like the demand of one adult on another are felt in the intensity, for her, of the common strains of childhood. The experience in all its varieties is recaptured with wonderful immediacy:

' "Not so close", he said, stooping over her potatoes, taking some out and rearranging the others. She stood by looking on, with the painful terrified helplessness of childhood. He was so unseeing and confident, she wanted to do the thing and yet she could not. She stood by looking on, her little blue overall fluttering in the wind, the red woollen ends of her shawl blowing gustily. Then he went down the row, relentlessly, turning the potatoes in with his sharp spade-cuts. He took no notice of her, only worked on. He had another world from hers.

'She stood helplessly, stranded on his world. He continued his work. She knew she would not help him. A little bit forlorn, at last she turned away, and ran down the garden, away from him, as fast as she could go away from him, to forget him and his work.

'He missed her presence, her face in her red woollen bonnet, her blue overall fluttering. She ran to where a little water ran trickling between grass and stones. That she loved.

'When he came by her he said to her:

' "You didn't help me much".

'The child looked at him dumbly. Already her heart was heavy because of her own disappointment. Her mouth was dumb and pathetic. But he did not notice, he went his way.

'And she played on, because of her disappointment persisting even the more in her play. She dreaded work, because she could not do it as he did. She was conscious of the great breach between them. She knew she had no power. The grown-up power to work deliberately was a mystery to her'.

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Then there are the occasions when Will, with that unregarding ferocity which the relation (a comment on it) permits him, turns on her—as in the episode of the trampled seed-bed:

> 'It had shocked him in his intent world to see the zig-zagging line of deep little foot-prints across his work. The child was infinitely more shocked. Her vulnerable little soul was flayed and trampled. Why were the foot-prints there? She had not wanted to make them. She stood dazzled with pain and shame and unreality'.
>
> . . . . .
>
> ' "I'll break your obstinate little face", he said, through shut teeth, lifting his hand.
>
> 'The child did not alter in the least. The look of indifference, complete glancing indifference, as if nothing but herself existed to her, remained fixed.
>
> 'Yet far away in her, the sobs were tearing her soul. And when he had gone, she would go and creep under the parlour sofa, and lie clinched in the silent, hidden misery of childhood.
>
> 'When she crawled out, after an hour or so, she went rather stiffly to play. She willed to forget. She cut off her childish soul from memory, so that the pain, and the insult, should not be real. She asserted herself only. There was now nothing in the world but her own self. So very soon, she came to believe in the outward malevolence that was against her. And very early she learned that even her adored father was part of this malevolence'

Now this of course is not in every way the notorious relation between Lawrence himself and his mother: Will is a man, the failure in his life is of a different kind from that in Mrs. Lawrence's, and his blind rages and his perversities (as exemplified in the incidents of the jumping from the bridge with Ursula on his back into the canal, and of the swing-boat at the fair) have no equivalent in *Sons and Lovers*. Yet that we have here pretty directly the insight brought from Lawrence's personal misfortune is pretty plain. And this general statement from *The Rainbow* clearly covers both cases:

> 'Still she set towards him like a quivering needle. All her life was directed by her awareness of him, her wakefulness to his being. And she was against her mother.
>
> 'Her father was the dawn wherein her consciousness woke up. But for him, she might have gone on like the other children, Gudrun and Theresa and Catherine, one with the insects and flowers and playthings, having no existence apart from the concrete object of her attention. But her father came too near to her. The clasp of his hands and the power of his breast, woke her up almost in pain from the transient unconsciousness of childhood. Wide-eyed, unseeing, she was awake before she knew how to see. She was awakened too soon. Too soon the call had come to her, when she was a small baby, and her father held her close to his breast, her sleep-living heart was beaten into

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wakefulness by the striving of his bigger heart, by his clasping her to his body for love and for fulfilment, asking as a magnet must always ask. From her the response had struggled dimly, vaguely, into being'.

Replace 'father' by 'mother', and 'he' by 'she', and this is Lawrence describing what happened to him in his childhood. I spoke above of his 'misfortune'; but the question forced upon us by the comparison between *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* is: What, for a genius, *is* misfortune? The personal note of the earlier (but not so very much earlier) book has vanished in *The Rainbow*; the catharsis was complete and final; and those who talk as if Lawrence had been warped for life or in some way disabled by the strain set up in babyhood would be hard put to it to assemble any weight of critical evidence from the writings. There is in fact no more impressive mark of his genius than what he did with his 'misfortune': he turned it into insight. It was a triumph of supreme intelligence—the intelligence that is inseparable from imagination and self-knowledge.

In its use in *The Rainbow* the experience is wholly impersonalized (and, in being impersonalized, extended). There is nothing about it diagnostic in relation to the writer; it is experience that understands itself. When Tom Brangwen marries Lydia, older, foreign and a lady, we think of Lawrence and Frieda: the parallel is clearly not accidental. But, again, the element belongs as much and as inevitably to the impersonal dramatic whole as any other in it; we shouldn't, if we hadn't had the special knowledge, have guessed at any special relation here to the author's personal history. Lawrence uses this experience because, duly transformed, it presents itself as right for the development of his theme, and, more generally, *because he finds himself free to use all his experience for the* definition of the significances he has discerned: none is especially difficult or painful or compulsive.

In Anna Lensky too, it has been noted, we had a very young child 'wide-eyed, unseeing, . . . awake before she knew how to see' because of the demand made upon her by a parent, here the mother. Further than this there is nothing that recalls the Lawrence history, and we have here the extremely clear clinching instance of the general truth: what Lawrence derived from the strain and disturbance he had suffered was a quick sense for the excessive demand by parent on child, and, in each concrete case, a sure insight into the dangers.

Of the lives dealt with in *The Rainbow*, that nearest to Lawrence's own is Ursula's, and in important ways it is very near. The impersonalizing process has its overt manifestation in the sex—the she-protagonist. One can imagine cases in which such a manifestation, the substitution of the other sex for the author's, might be the mark of an impersonality unachieved or insecure, a disguise prompted by a sense of danger. But in Lawrence it is clearly not that; it is rather the mark of creative genius, the impulse and the power to transcend the merely personal predicament by the intelli-

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gence that is imagination—or the imagination that is intelligence. To a masculine reader, at any rate, Ursula is astonishingly *there*—certainly not less convincingly a girl, or less inwardly done, than George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver.

In fact, in this matter too Lawrence has marked advantages over George Eliot. And the comparison has a special point. So insistent, indeed, at times, in chapters X and XI ('The Widening Circle' and 'First Love') is the suggestion of Maggie herself as to prompt the observation that *The Mill on the Floss* had certainly made a profound impression on Lawrence. But his insight he brings from life, from his experience and observation, and it is more penetrating than George Eliot's whose Maggie, the comparison reminds us, is too much Maggie's. Ursula's adolescent ardours and earnestnesses and confusions are inwardly enough evoked, but they are evoked by an intelligence that is immensely more mature than Ursula's. Not that Lawrence, in understanding better, shows less sympathy than George Eliot. And nowhere does it appear more plainly than in these chapters that he was brought up in the 'environment' of the same 'living tradition' ('living and central'—surely the whole of Mr. Eliot's phrase applies). For, in presenting Ursula's wrestlings with the problems with which life faces the adolescent, Lawrence gives us also the 'environment' from which they are inseparable—gives us the particular relevant 'environment', of course; and anyone who wishes to know what, in the concrete, in the matter of religion, a living tradition is—or has been in provincial England—would do well to consider these pages of *The Rainbow*.

There is the confusing problem, for Ursula, of the relation between the Sunday world and the week-day world. It is bound up with the confusion that without fully realizing its nature, George Eliot presents in Maggie Tulliver:

> 'Early in the year, when the lambs came, and shelters were built of straw, and on her uncle's farm the men sat at night with a lantern and a dog, then again there swept over her this passionate confusion between the vision world and the week-day world. Again she felt Jesus in the countryside. Ah, she would lift up the lambs in his arms! Ah, and she was the lamb. Again, in the morning, going down the lane, she heard the ewe call, and the lambs came running, shaking and twinkling with new-born bliss. And she saw them stooping, nuzzling, groping to the udder, to find the teats, whilst the mother turned her head gravely and sniffed her own. And they were sucking, vibrating with bliss on their little, long legs, their throats stretched up, their new bodies quivering, to the stream of blood-warm, loving milk.
>
> 'Oh, and the bliss, the bliss!'

Ursula comments on herself, with shame, that she confuses the spiritual with the carnal, and uses the idea of Jesus 'to pander to her own carnality'. The conditions of her ability to distinguish this much in respect of her 'passionate yearning' are there in what

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we have been shown of traditional religion as a concrete presence. There is that evocation, in 'The Widening Circle', of the Brangwen Sunday. Mr. Eliot once referred suggestively to Lawrence's 'hymn-singing' mother; Lawrence himself, it is said, was a puritan; and the most adverse impressions have been recorded of the Victorian English Sunday. For adverse impressions, undoubtedly, there has been much justification. But if it should be necessary to show that there is more to be said about the place of the English Sunday in the history of English civilization, it would be enough to adduce this chapter of *The Rainbow*, so illustrating once again the incomparable wealth of the novel as social and cultural history.

Lawrence here is unmistakably writing out of experience—remembering the life at home of his childhood:

> 'On this day of decorum, the Brangwen family went to church by the high-road, making a detour outside all the garden-hedge, rather than climb the wall into the churchyard. There was no law of this, from the parents. The children themselves were the wardens of the Sabbath decency, very jealous and instant with each other.
>
> 'It came to be, gradually, that after church on Sundays the house was really something of a sanctuary, with peace breathing like a strange bird alighted in the rooms. Indoors, only reading and tale-telling and quiet pursuits, such as drawing, were allowed. Out of doors, all playing was to be carried on unobtrusively. If there were noise, yelling and shouting, then some fierce spirit woke up in the father and the elder children so that the younger were subdued, afraid of being excommunicated.
>
> 'The children themselves preserved the Sabbath. If Ursula in her vanity sang:
>
> "Il était un' bergère
> Et ron-ron-ron petit patapon",
>
> Theresa was sure to cry:
>
> '"*That's* not a Sunday song, our Ursula".
>
> '"You don't know" replied Ursula, superior. Nevertheless, she wavered. And her song faded down before she came to the end.
>
> 'Because, though she did not know it, her Sunday was very precious to her. She found herself in a strange, undefined place, where her spirit could wander in dreams, unassailed.
>
> 'The white-robed spirit of Christ passed between olive trees. It was a vision, not a reality. And she herself partook of the visionary being. There was the voice in the night calling, "Samuel, Samuel!" And still the voice called in the night. But not this night, nor last night, but in the unfathomed night of Sunday, of the Sabbath silence'.

That something valid and of great value has its record here is established as only the art of a great novelist *could* establish it (I am thinking, of course, of the passage in its whole context).

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But no one reading Lawrence will be tempted to simplify or sentimentalize; with an astringent delicacy that is peculiarly his, and a clear-eyed subtlety, he explores in terms of Ursula's experience the question, the lived question, of what the relations should be, or can be, between that something and the week-day world. But to put it in this way, of course, is itself to simplify; the question at the same time regards the nature of the something, and the complexity, calling for discriminations, of the 'Sunday world'.

But in how full a sense a *living* tradition informed the environment in which Ursula Brangwen grew up has yet to be suggested. A quotation of some length is necessary. Again the power of the great artist provides the testimony that could have been provided in no other way.

> 'Still, it was there, even if it were faint and inadequate. The cycle of creation still wheeled in the Christian year'.

The statement has behind it an evocation that is astonishing in its poetic force. It is indisputably enough 'there' in Lawrence's prose to make the statement indisputable, the 'rhythm of eternity'—'this rhythm of eternity in a ragged inconsequential life'—taking us back to the England of *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*. The 'old mystery play of St. George and Beelzebub' makes its significant appearance in the first of the quoted paragraphs; the older than Christian traditions that it represents, traditions constituting (as the passage itself testifies) so much of the strength of the traditional religion, are a potent presence in the whole passage, with its evocation of the 'Church year'. It strikes one now as astonishing that the England of the late nineteenth century could have produced *this*—I speak of the whole burden and effect—for Lawrence to record (for that, with his intuitive creative genius he is recording an actual 'environment' no one capable of reading *The Rainbow* can doubt):

> 'Gradually there gathered the feeling of expectation. Christmas was coming. In the shed, at nights, a secret candle was burning, a sound of veiled voices was heard. The boys were learning the old mystery play of St. George and Beelzebub. Twice a week, by lamplight, there was choir practice in the church, for the learning of old carols Brangwen wanted to hear. The girls went to these practices. Everywhere was a sense of mystery and rousedness. Everybody was preparing for something.
>
> 'The time came near, the girls were decorating the church, with cold fingers binding holly and fir and yew about the pillars, till a new spirit was in the church, the stone broke out into dark rich leaf, the arches put forth their buds, and cold flowers rose to blossom in the dim, mystic atmosphere. Ursula must weave mistletoe over the door, and over the screen, and hang a silver dove from a sprig of yew, till dusk came down, and the church was like a grove.

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'In the cow-shed the boys were blacking their faces for a dress-rehearsal; the turkey hung dead, with opened, speckled wings, in the dairy. The time was come to make pies, in readiness.

'The expectation grew more tense. The star was risen into the sky, the songs, the carols were ready to hail it. The star was the sign in the sky. Earth too should give a sign. As evening drew on, hearts beat fast with anticipation, hands were full of ready gifts. There were the tremulously expectant words of the church service, the night was past and the morning was come, the gifts were given and received, joy and peace made a flapping of wings in each heart, there was a great burst of carols, the Peace of the World had dawned, strife had passed away, every hand linked in hand, every heart was singing.

'It was bitter, though, that Christmas day, as it drew on to evening, and night, became a sort of bank holiday, flat and stale. The morning was so wonderful, but in the afternoon and evening the ecstasy perished like a nipped thing, like a bud in a false spring. Alas, that Christmas was only a domestic feast of sweet-meats and toys! Why did not the grown-ups also change their everyday hearts, and give way to ecstasy? Where was the ecstasy?' . . . . .

'Still it was there, even if it were faint and inadèquate. The cycle of creation still wheeled in the Christian year.

. . . . .

'So the children lived the year of Christianity, the epic of the soul of mankind. Year by year the inner, unknown drama went on in them, their hearts were born and came to fulness, suffered on the cross, gave up the ghost, and rose again to unnumbered days, untired, having at least this rhythm of eternity in a ragged, inconsequential life'.

This 'environment' doesn't represent the England in which Ursula, as she grows up, will have to achieve her 'fulfilment'. It is in the logic of Lawrence's theme that for the third generation the problem should pose itself in more complex terms, as the cultural conditions become more sophisticated. This development follows from the mother's aspiration for her children, in so far as that takes effect:

'It was this, this education, this higher form of being, that the mother wished to give to her children, so that they too could live the supreme life on earth. For her children, at least the children of her heart, had the complete nature that should take place in equality with the living, vital people in the land, not be left behind obscure among the labourers. Why must they remain obscured and stifled all their lives, why should they suffer from lack of freedom to move? How should they learn the entry into the finer, more vivid circle of life?'

But the change has at the same time a representative quality; we watch the movement of civilization in England. Ursula has to live

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her problem in the England of D. H. Lawrence. In fact, her life, though she is convincingly a girl and a young woman, bears something closely approaching an autobiographical relation to Lawrence's own. In Ursula's experience as a teacher in St. Philip's School, and then as a student at University College, Nottingham, we have, unmistakably (though without incongruity) some direct transcription.

It is significant that the problems of personal relations as they are now dealt with involve explicit reference to the state or tendency of the civilization in which they are staged. Thus Anton Skrebensky's inadequacy has for a major aspect this:

> 'He went about at his duties, giving himself up to them. At the bottom of his heart his self, the soul that aspired and had true hope of self-effectuation, lay as dead, still-born, a dead-weight in his womb. Who was he, to hold important his personal connection? What did a man matter personally? He was just a brick in the whole great social fabric, the nation, the modern humanity . . . . One had to fill one's place in the whole, the great scheme of man's elaborate civilization, that was all'.

He believed in the greatest good of the greatest number, unable to see that 'the highest good of the community as it stands is no longer the highest good of even the average individual'. 'He thought that, because the community represents millions of people, therefore it must be millions of times more important than any individual, forgetting that the community is an abstraction from the many, and is not the many themselves'. And so 'there came over Skrebensky a nullity, which more and more terrified Ursula'.

It will not, however, do to suggest that the essential exposition of Skrebensky's case is a matter of statement and explicit analysis. These are altogether secondary; they owe their force, as they come in the book, to the dramatically and poetically rendered significances they resume. We have here, in fact, one of the characteristic methods (a triumphantly successful one) of *Women in Love*. The statement or analysis relates immediately to what has been said in discussion of the same themes between the actors, discussion that comes with perfect dramatic naturalness, and has its completion and main force in some relevant episode or enactment. We have an instance in the episode of the barge in the chapter, 'First Love'.

The lovers are walking together, and the setting is evoked in a passage that might well be adduced as illustrating a kind of power that critics are very ready to credit Lawrence with, though neither the nature of what is in front of them, nor, consequently, the genius at work in it, gets as a rule anything that can properly be called recognition:

> 'The blue way of the canal wound softly between the autumn hedges, on towards the greenness of a small hill. On the left was the whole black agitation of colliery and railway and the town which rose on its hill, the church tower topping all. The round white dot of the clock on the tower was distinct in the evening light.

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'That way, Ursula felt, was the way to London, through the grim, alluring seethe of the town. On the other hand was the evening, mellow over the green water-meadows and the winding alder trees beside the river, and the pale stretches of stubble beyond. There the evening glowed softly, and even a pee-wit was flapping in solitude and peace.

'Ursula and Anton Skrebensky walked along the ridge of the canal between. The berries on the hedges were crimson and bright red, above the leaves. The glow of evening and the wheeling of the solitary pee-wit and the faint cry of the birds came to meet the shuffling noise of the pits, the dark, fuming stress of the town opposite, and they two walked the blue strip of water-way, the ribbon of sky between'.

What we have here is no mere 'lyrical' description, functional in the sense that the lovers' walk has to take place somewhere, and may fitly be made the occasion for some poetically evocative writing. The point of the passage, in terms of significance, comes in that close: 'and they two walked the blue strip of waterway, the ribbon of sky between'. The symbolism is unobtrusive, but, clinched in that 'between', quite unmistakable. There are the lovers with life before them, the world (its contrasts and complexities represented in local terms) around them, and the great decisions (they must feel) still to take. Skrebensky talks about his work in the service, and Ursula asks him: 'Do you like to be a soldier?' She wants a real answer, and presses him, and he replies, yes, if there were a war he would want to go:

' "I should be doing something, it would be genuine. It's a sort of toy-life as it is".'

Ursula continues to press him, and the exchange goes on through a page to this conclusion:

' "I hate soldiers, they are stiff and wooden. What do you fight for, really?"

' "I would fight for the nation".

' "For all that, you aren't the nation. What would you do for yourself?"

' "I belong to the nation and must do my duty by the nation".

' "But when it didn't need your services in particular—when there *is* no fighting? What would you do then?"

'He was irritated.

' "I would do what everybody else does".

' "What?"

' "Nothing. I would be in readiness for when I was needed".

'The answer came in exasperation.

' "It seems to me", she answered, "as if you weren't anybody—as if there wasn't anybody there, where you are. Are you anybody really? You seem like nothing to me".'

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At this point they come to the barge and see the man sitting on a box outside the cabin, nursing a baby. There follows the scene between Ursula, the bargee and the bargee's wife, which ends with the decision on the part of these two, the parents, to name the baby after Ursula, and with her leaving her necklace round the baby's neck for a gift. The whole, one can confidently venture, would have compelled the warmest admiration from George Eliot, such are the touch and the tone; yet the tone—which, when one examines it, leads one to the analysis of a delicately complex poise—is not George Eliot at all; it is pure Lawrence. And of the whole effect it is enough here to say that when we read the paragraphs that follow they merely give explicitness to a significance that we have already taken:

> 'She went hastening on, gladdened by having met the grimy, lean man with the ragged moustache. He gave her a pleasant warm feeling. He made her feel the richness of her own life Skrebensky, somehow, had created a deadness round her, a sterility, as if the world were ashes.
>
> 'They said very little as they hastened home to the big supper. He was envying the lean father of three children, for his impudent directness and his worship of the woman in Ursula, a worship of body and soul together, the man's body and soul wistful and worshipping the body and spirit of the girl, with a desire that knew the inaccessibility of its object, but was only glad to know that the perfect thing existed, glad to have had a moment of communion.
>
> 'Why could not he himself desire a woman so? Why did he never really want a woman, not with the whole of him: never loved, never worshipped, only just physically wanted her'.

The relation between Skrebensky's inadequacy as a lover and what may be called his 'public spirit', his good-citizen acceptance of the social function as the ultimate meaning of life, has been fully *done*—bodied forth, one might say. Ursula's judgment, 'You seem like nothing to me', has its full charge of significance. And the reader recalls here how Ursula (see the beginning of the chapter) having concluded that 'only the week-day world mattered', found nevertheless a 'residue of the Sunday world' persisting within her:

> 'One was responsible to the world for what one did.
>
> 'Nay, one was more than responsible to the world. One was responsible to oneself. There was some puzzling, tormenting residue of the Sunday world, some persistent Sunday self, which insisted on a relationship with the now shut-away vision world'.

In personal relations with Skrebensky, however, she manifests an inadequacy answering to this. The essential relation between them is given in their dancing, as they dance together at Frederick Brangwen's wedding-supper, which is also a celebration of harvest; the whole thing—the supper, the dance, and the subsequent scene in the moonlit stackyard—being done with a sensuous and disturbing force that is intensely Lawrence, and not for a moment suggestive

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of anyone else (least of all George Eliot).

When Skrebensky has gone away (he goes to the South African war, and an absence of years follows), the passionate attachment dealt with in the chapter called 'Shame' forms between Ursula and her class-mistress Miss Inger. Winifred Inger is intellectually superior, and her cultured enlightenment is impressive enough to have at first a great effect on Ursula:

> 'It was a strange world the girl was swept into, like a chaos, like the end of the world. She was too young to understand it all Yet the inoculation passed into her, through her love for her mistress'.

The love itself is diagnostic in respect of Miss Inger, whose passion for Ursula goes with an attitude towards men that she states in terms of advanced feminist thought. For Ursula, we are told later, in the teaching days at St. Philip's School, when her friend is Maggie,

> 'the vote was never a reality. She had within her the strange, passionate knowledge of religion and living far transcending the limits of the automatic system that contained the vote. But her fundamental, organic knowledge had as yet to take form and rise to utterance'.

More and more she feels (as we are made to do) that, deep within, life has somehow been thwarted, and gone wrong, in Winifred Inger, that 'rather beautiful woman of twenty-eight, a fearless, clean type of modern girl whose very independence betrays her sorrow'. The significance in terms of the environing modern world, a significance that, in relating her feminism to Skrebensky's Benthamism (as it might be called) relates her inadequacy to his, comes out when she marries Tom Brangwen, Ursula's uncle:

> 'He too was at the end of all his desires. He had done the things he had wanted to. They had all ended in a disintegrated lifelessness of soul, which he hid under an utterly tolerant good-humour. He no longer cared about anything on earth, neither man nor woman, nor God nor humanity. He had come to a stability of nullification'.

He is now a scientifically efficient colliery-manager, and the failure of life in him expresses itself in a worship of the machine, and an acquiescence in the surrender of life to the industrial or social function; in subordination to the function as the only meaning that, for miner or manager, life can have. Introduced by Ursula to Winifred, he 'looked at the athletic, seemingly fearless girl, and detected in her a kinship with his own dark corruption'.

> ' "But is this place as awful as it looks?" the young girl asked, a strain in her eyes.
>
> ' "It is just what it looks", he said. "It hides nothing".

A long discussion of the place and the people follows between them;

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'Ursula sat black-souled and very bitter, hearing the two of them talk. There seemed something ghoulish even in their very deploring of the state of things. They seemed to take a ghoulish satisfaction in it. The pit was the great mistress. Ursula looked out of the window and saw the proud, demon-like colliery with her wheels twinkling in the heavens, the formless, squalid mass of the town lying aside. It was the squalid heap of side-shows. The pit was the main show, the *raison d'être* of all.

'How terrible it was! There *was* a horrible fascination in it—human bodies and lives subjected in slavery to that symmetric monster of the colliery. There was a swooning, perverse satisfaction in it. For a moment she was dizzy.

'Then she recovered, felt herself in a great loneliness, wherein she was sad but free. She had departed. No more would she subscribe to the great colliery, to the great machine which has taken us all captives. In her soul, she was against it, she disowned even its power. It had only to be forsaken to be inane, meaningless. And she knew it was meaningless. But it needed a great, passionate effort of will on her part, seeing the colliery, still to maintain her knowledge that it was meaningless'.

The colliery, of course, is not merely the colliery; it is 'the great machine that has taken us all captives'. We have, in this later part of *The Rainbow*, the very world of *Women in Love*; the distinctive themes and tones of the later book, and the same sense of the plight of human life in an industrial civilization. In the relations between Miss Inger and Tom Brangwen, added to those between Ursula and Skrebensky, we have well-developed notes—clear, if only rough and tentative,—for the drama of Gerald Crich and Gudrun, all the extra-personal significance of Gerald being plainly forecast.

Themes are proposed that clearly cannot be dealt with in this book. Further, they involve a sense of contemporary civilization, a perception of the problems, that has developed since the enterprise of *The Rainbow* was conceived. No real conclusion of the book, only a breaking-off, is possible—if only because the Lawrence who started it has changed too much.

It is not likely that Lawrence *said* this to himself. What he was most conscious of, probably, was the desire to get this book somehow finished and done with, in order that he might get on with the one he now wanted to write. There is something oddly desperate about that closing page-and-a-half; the convalescent Ursula's horrified vision, from her windows, of the industrial world outside, and then that confident note of prophetic hope in the final paragraph—a note wholly unprepared and unsupported, defying the preceding pages:

'And the rainbow stood on the earth. She knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world's corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that

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they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven'.

The Lawrence of *Women in Love* could not have written that paragraph. And it was not really written by the Lawrence of the later part of *The Rainbow*; the note is one recaptured, momentarily, for the occasion. That this should be so constitutes, in a sense, an implicit criticism of *The Rainbow* by Lawrence himself. The spirit or radical mood represented (as that closing paragraph illustrates) by the symbol that gives its name to the book was one that he had left behind (as, again, the incongruity of the paragraph when it comes forces upon our notice) before he had fully worked out the conception and seen his way to bring the book to a close. But who can but be grateful that he committed himself to the book? There it is, the wonderfully original work of a great genius. It is not the less something solidly achieved (and there is nothing like it) because it is open to the kind of commentary provoked by that ending. In fact, the imperfection that can be urged against it as a 'work of art' is really in and of the essential achievement, and can properly be described as—more than a condition—an aspect of the unique positive value, the achieved significance, of what has been done.

For *The Rainbow* exemplifies in a special way the peculiar Laurentian genius: the extraordinary power of the impersonalizing intelligence to maintain, while the artist, in an intensely personal exploratory way, is actually living the experience that goes into the art, the conditions that make creative impersonality possible. When Lawrence started *The Rainbow* he knew that it was only by further living—not by mere further pondering of experience already lived—that he could complete it; he hadn't the end then in his mind, already fully conceived. This meant that, in fact, he found himself faced later with a problem in art that he couldn't solve because he had grown into a more daunting perception of the problem in life; but it meant also that we have a great work that we shouldn't otherwise had had. For it is hard to see how we could have had this marvellous rendering of the movement of life through the generations in any other way. (How non-significant in its externality does Arnold Bennett's much-praised evocation of the passage of life and time show itself to be when we go to *The Old Wives' Tale* from *The Rainbow*!) The Lawrence of the opening of *The Rainbow* himself saw the rainbow spanning the day: that, patently, was *of* the creative impulsion to the undertaking. He was very close in feeling to the aspiration of the Brangwen mother at the Marsh Farm. The Lawrence who developed in the writing of it found himself compelled to another mood; he expresses in the later part of the book that sense of human problems as they are in contemporary civilization which has its profound and complete expression in *Women in Love*. And so the development of the theme through the successive life-

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cycles has at the same time its poignant immediacy in all its phases and its representative historical quality.

The Lawrence of *Women in Love* no longer wants to contemplate the past that goes back to the Marsh Farm and its rainbow. His mood is that expressed by the Ursula of *Women in Love*:

> 'A flash of a few lights on the darkness—Ghent Station! A few more spectres moving outside on the platform—then the bell—then motion again through the level darkness. Ursula saw a man with a lantern come out of a farm by the railway, and cross to the dark farm-buildings. She thought of the Marsh, the old, intimate farm-life at Cossethay. My God! how far she was projected from her childhood, how far was she still to go! In one life-time one travelled through aeons. The great chasm of memory from her childhood in the intimate country surroundings of Cossethay and the Marsh Farm . . . was so great that it seemed she had no identity, that the child she had been, playing in Cossethay churchyard, was a little creature of history, not herself'.

As for the imperfection of *The Rainbow*, the absence of an inevitable close matters, when one sees what the book does, not at all. A more serious criticism, perhaps, bears on the signs of too great a tentativeness in the development and organization of the later part; signs of a growing sense in the writer of an absence of any conclusion in view. Things very striking in themselves haven't as clear a function as they ought to have. Above all, the sterile deadlock between Ursula and Skrebensky—a theme calling, we can see, for the development it gets in *Women in Love*, but cannot have here—seems too long-drawn-out.

Yet how small a sum these criticisms amount to when one takes stock of what has been achieved. This is enough to make *The Rainbow* a classic, and a major one. The rendering of the continuity and rhythm of life through the individual lives has involved a marvellous invention of form, and no one who sees what is done will complain of the absence of what is not done. It is the same life, and they are different lives, living differently the same problems—the same though different—in three interlinked generations: that is how the form is felt.

And how much of England that can have no other record than the creative writer's there is in *The Rainbow*. The wealth of the book in this respect is such as must make it plain to any reader that, as social historian, Lawrence, among novelists is unsurpassed. Actually he is, in the strict sense, incomparable. *The Rainbow* shows us the transmission of the spiritual heritage in an actual society, and shows it in relation to the general development of civilization. Where *Women in Love* has that astonishing comprehensiveness in the presentment of contemporary England (or the England of 1914), *The Rainbow* has instead its historical depth. These two books would by themselves have been enough to place Lawrence among the greatest English writers.

F. R. LEAVIS.

[*Concluded.*]

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GRAHAM GREENE: A COMMENT

'Le plus beau livre paru en 1949 est pour moi le roman de Graham Greene, *Le Noeud de la Question* (*The Heart of the Matter*). La foi religieuse de l'auteur ajoute, si j'ose dire, une dimension nouvelle qui fait défaut aux romans les plus célèbres; il y a là une avance en profondeur qui met Greene au premier rang de la littérature universelle. Ce Catholique est en "prise directe" avec son époque. Nul mieux que lui ne nous rend sensible le tragique de la condition humaine en 1949'.

François Mauriac, *Sunday Times*.

'. . . it would be generally agreed, I think, by his fellow writers that Graham Greene is the leading English male novelist of his generation . . . . Of these [aspects of his art] the first and most important is his deep-rooted and profound awareness of evil'.

Walter Allen, *Penguin New Writing*, No. 18 (1943).

'His [Graham Greene's] approach to the novel is like that of no novelist in English before him . . . as if he had taken the bones of the conventional thriller, clothed them with life and character, and elevated them to a symbolic purpose; he has seen what is psychologically archetypical in such popular literary themes as that of the hunted man and has dramatised them with all the vigour and consciousness of serious art'.

Henry Reed, *The Novel since 1939* (1946).

THESE by no means unrepresentative comments on the work of Mr. Graham Greene will provide a fair statement of the reasons advanced for its prestige and remind us that this is very considerable. In France, indeed, at least two full-length books have been written about it and in 1951 *The Power and the Glory* gained a place in the Agrégation syllabus. And now there has appeared in England, with a university English lecturer as part-author, *The Art of Graham Greene*, which is a lengthy, detailed study. 'Greene', its authors say, 'requires to be read with this "poetic" attention' ('the kind of attention to verbal and structural niceties that we pay as a matter of course even to minor poetry'). It seems a fitting time to express one's doubts.

Although Mr. Greene published his first novel in 1929 and first attained 'Penguin' status (about early 1940) with a book of 1934, it was *Brighton Rock* (1938) which first set the tone of his current reputation; and it did so by virtue of a theological interest, hinted at previously, which was to be even more prominent in *The Power and the Glory*, *The Heart of the Matter* and *The End*

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of The Affair—and, of course, in a different way, in *The Lawless Roads*, the travel book which contains much of the raw material for *The Power and the Glory*. It is not likely that anyone would have argued long for so lofty a rating on the score of his previous books—not even of *England Made Me*, which, according to Mr. Allott and Miss Farris, in *The Art of Graham Greene*, 'Greene himself places third after *The Heart of the Matter* in order of achievement among his novels'. For all the ring of conviction in the presentation of the ne'er-do-well Anthony and some vigorous journalistic description and brisk, cinematic 'cutting', the book is a not very subtle mixture of the hardboiled and the sentimental at a very superficial level, with some tritely and clumsily handled patches of inner monologue which reveal jarringly its shallowness. The thrillers, *A Gun for Sale, The Confidential Agent,* or (later) *The Ministry of Fear,* have certainly assurance and pace in their class, and each shows a certain interest in matters of personality and conduct (with a marked and regrettable sentimental twist of vision) in a form somewhat anticipatory of the more serious 'novel' that follows it, which enables them to catch a reflection of importance from the more ambitious books; but their author's own classification of them as 'entertainments' not 'novels', question-begging though it is (for one can't keep books to weights like boxers), clearly enough proclaims their limitations if it does not define them. The late, theology-conscious 'novels' it is, then, that carry the reputation, and of these *The Power and the Glory* has obviously the first call on the attention.

It plainly offers several kinds of interest capable of getting in the way of a fully critical reading. There is the informational one ('This novel is founded on the situation in Mexico rather more than ten years ago . . .'), the provocative, 'ideas' element and the appeal to Catholics; and there is the 'underground', 'hunted man' element, which would be specially fitted to appeal to French 'Resistance' sentiments. (It was in France that the present writer had expounded to him at length and with passion a Greeneian philosophy of 'l'homme traqué' based almost solely on the film, not the story, *The Third Man*). Less plain is how much is positively done in this story of the brandy-addicted priest who doggedly yet half-unwillingly continues his sacramental ministrations in defiance of the anti-religious government of his state. It is less a story about the 'whisky priest' than a statement of the providence of Almighty God working through imperfect human agents and exploiting the very success of the anti-religious forces; for the execution of the priest revives religious sympathy in the boy Luis, and it is to Luis's house on the very same night that a newly arrived priest comes to continue the secret work. 'For Thine', in fact, 'is . . . the power and the glory for ever and ever'. In its own way the novel is like one of Luis's mother's edifying, fortifying accounts of martyrdom, and as such relies on its historical truth and on beliefs that are outside purely literary discussion. It is also, however, the expression of feelings towards the figure of the priest which may

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be suggested briefly in words taken from *The Lawless Roads*: '. . . but who can judge what terror and hardship and isolation may have excused him in the eyes of God?'; a study, that is, of character and personality.

Certain features of this use of a pursuit sequence to ennoble the pursued limit severely the scope and thence the quality of the personal study. It is the protagonist's good qualities, his loyalty and courage, that bring about his dangers and death, not his bad ones, and the bad ones are not utilised to produce any of that significant action which is the analytic and evaluative structure of a novel. The threat of betrayal by Brigitta, his child, brings something of the kind near, a development into catastrophic result of the character weakness which had produced the child, but the threat is not fulfilled and there is merely the suspense of a narrow escape. Brigitta simply adds to the remorse of the priest and thus increases the emotional potential. Secondly, there is the fact that Catholic teaching dissociates the sacramental functions of the priest from his own spiritual state, as having their validity and virtue 'ex opere operato' not 'ex opere operantis'—which means that at its most crucial point the priest's power to function is beyond the influence of his behaviour and he is in very important respects no more than a mechanism in the action. The question of deterioration and slackness in his personal pastoral efficiency, though mentioned, is not given importance. Sacrilegious celebration of Mass, of course, deepens his guilt and sense of guilt, which is given an important place in his state of mind (though it is not very sharply realised), but this is a different matter. It is a matter of what we may see as an emotional packing filling out the thriller skeleton, the direct presentation of the priest's state of mind in the form of remorseful brooding over actions for the most part prior to the start of the novel; and the critical presentation of his faults is mainly if not wholly in this form. In fact, the study of will and conduct that the story might give rise to—without losing any of the sense of Providence—is not tackled at all: one is given instead a heavy emotional packing of self-condemnatory reverie, of a piece with the pervading tone of dejection and gloom. This is not to suggest that dejection of spirit has no place in a novel; it is to be critical of it when conveyed by mere emotionalism of expression, a flat, whining tone in the writing, which works, if it does work, by inducing motions of misery in the reader's mind, by the simulation of emotion. In this presentation of the priest through his voiced thoughts and feelings there is little discrimination. The general drift is to a purely sentimental writing-off with one hand of the faults which with the other are thrust forward as evidence of keen spiritual self-analysis.

> 'The routine of his life like a dam was cracked and forgetfulness came dribbling in, wiping out this and that. Five years ago he had given way to despair—the unforgiveable sin—and he was going back now to the scene of his despair with a curious

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lightening of the heart. He was a bad priest, he knew it: they had a word for his kind—a whisky priest, but every failure dropped out of sight and out of mind: somewhere they accumulated in secret—the rubble of his failures. One day they would choke up, he supposed, altogether the source of grace. Until then he carried on, with spells of fear, weariness, with a shamefaced lightness of heart'.

'There was a time when he had approached the Canon of the Mass with actual physical dread—the first time he had consumed the body and blood of God in a state of mortal sin: but then life bred its excuses—it hadn't after a while seemed to matter very much, whether he was damned or not, so long as these others . . .'.

'. . . he wondered why he had not gone the same road as Padre José and conformed to the laws. I was too ambitious, he thought, that was it . . . . No, if he had been humble like Padre José, he might be living in the capital now with Maria on a pension. This was pride, devilish pride, lying here offering his shirt to the man who wanted to betray him. Even his attempts at escape had been half-hearted because of his pride—the sin by which the angels fell. When he was the only priest left in the state his pride had been all the greater; he thought himself the devil of a fellow carrying God around at the risk of his life; one day there would be a reward . . . . How little his pride had to feed on—he had celebrated only four Masses this year, and he had heard perhaps a hundred confessions. It seemed to him that the dunce of any seminary could have done as well . . . or better'.

One wonders just what degree of gravity is being assigned to the various grounds for self-accusation; but the intention, plainly, is to claim sympathy and approbation for a self-sacrificing humility and searching self-knowledge in the priest—the result is to do it at the expense of any precise moral discrimination, of the very values that the book endorses. The flimsiness of the problem of 'devilish pride' in the last extract requires, I should think, no comment; while the considerations suggested by 'only four Masses' and so on are, as previously said, left merely to weight further the remorse.

This crudity of content where claims are being made for a subtle spiritual insight is fairly matched by the unsatisfactory nature of the expression, with its choppy, rhythmless movement and imagery which draws attention to itself and its aptness rather than serves in communication. One is tempted to take the self-consciousness of the imagery as dramatically intended, as with other elements in what is a kind of dramatic monologue, but clearly it is not. The cracked dam and the fallen rubble show the kind of continuity of idea, the image-echoing, that is in Mr. Allott's mind in the passage quoted above (together with such things as the reiterated reference to cock-crow as police approach the village and betrayal seems likely); but while granting force to the reiterative and the symbolic,

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one may yet question the quality of the final product. The priest's last night in his cell is presented characteristically and with pathos, but it is a pathos coming from emotionalism of tone, the tenseness in the voice which is written into the movement of the prose, rather than from a solid evocation of the scene, the factors and the consequences. There is a lack of 'placing', of any clear discrimination between elements in the faults of the past and the mood of the moment; again we are given the movements of remorse and a form of self-pity to share, not an evaluating vision of a situation and a state of mind. It is the result of the author's total adoption of his character's thoughts. There are also distinct failures in expression, which only a deliberately sustained emotional pitch of voice will carry one over.

> 'then he began to cry, beating his head gently against the wall . . . He woke with a huge feeling of hope which suddenly and completely left him at the first sight of the prison yard. It was the morning of his death. He crouched on the floor with the empty brandy-flask in his hand trying to remember an Act of Contrition. 'O God, I am sorry and beg pardon for all my sins . . . crucified . . . worthy of thy dreadful punishments'. He was confused, his mind was on other things: it was not the good death for which one always prayed. He caught sight of his own shadow on the cell wall: it had a look of surprise and grotesque unimportance. What a fool he had been to think that he was strong enough to stay when others fled. What an impossible fellow I am, he thought, and how useless. I have done nothing for anybody. I might just as well have never lived. His parents were dead—soon he wouldn't even be a memory—perhaps after all he wasn't really Hell-worthy. Tears poured down his face: he was not at the moment afraid of damnation—even the fear of pain was in the background. He felt only an immense disappointment because he had to go to God empty-handed, with nothing done at all'.

There is something very much less than realised in the 'beating his head gently'; the 'look of surprise' of the shadow is flashy and inadequate or, taken as a whimsicality of the priest, quite at odds with the mood attempted; and 'What an impossible fellow I am' is feeble and inappropriate. But bad, showy, shallow writing is frequent:

> 'The lieutenant stood there like a dark menacing question mark in the sun . . .'.

> 'His big sunburned face was like the map of a mountain region—patches of varying brown with two small blue lakes that were his eyes'.

> 'That was what the sun did to a child, reduced it to a framework. The gold bangle on the bony wrist was like a padlock on a canvas door which a fist could break'.

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'. . . a tiny green snake raised itself like an affronted woman on the path and then hissed away into the grass like a match-flame'.

'. . . what were probably snakes hissed away like match-flames through the grass'.

'Mr. Lehr slept on undisturbed upon his back with the thin rectitude of a bishop upon a tomb'.

'. . . the rain . . . came perpendicularly down, with a sort of measured intensity, as if it were driving nails into a coffin-lid'.

So obvious a weakness of writing may be thought to disqualify from prolonged examination, but the other defects should not be ignored—defects which are essential and must be reckoned grave even by a reader sympathetic with the religious intention and moved by the contemplation of such events as those narrated. These defects are the blurring of issues in the conduct of the priest and the blanketing of this lack of discrimination in a crude, unanalysed direct emotionalism, resulting in much falsification of values and romanticisation of what the book itself pronounces to be sinful.

With *The Heart of the Matter* we come to more familiar material and a sense of it which at bottom is familiar enough too. It is that of the man, wife and other woman, and the issues are felt out with a throroughly romantic, condoning sensibility; the theological sanctions so insistently invoked adding much savour to the romantic appeal of conduct which is a defiance of them. This savour is what they most positively produce, but their real purpose is as spiritual co-ordinates for the measuring and shaping of the figure of Scobie in exemplification of the book's motto from Charles Péguy:

'Le pécheur est au coeur même de chrétienté . . . Nul n'est aussi compétent que le pécheur en matière de chrétienté. Nul, si ce n'est le saint'.

Interest is once more focussed on the question of damnation, in a full development of the idea in the old priest's talk of Péguy in *Brighton Rock*:

'. . . some people think he was—well, a saint. I think he died in what we are told is mortal sin . . . you can't conceive . . . the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God . . . . It was a case of greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his soul for his friend . . .'.

(In *The Power and the Glory* this idea of sinning for the sake of others was much diminished in scope and complexity by the impersonal nature of the priest's sacramental powers, which puts him in the exceptional position of being able to produce an unquestionable good unaffected by his own sinfulness in performing it).

The hero, a deputy police commissioner in West Africa, is presented as zealous, loyal, just, disinterested and conscientious, a practising Catholic, and almost ascetic in temperament. Yet he

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commits various indiscretions and the grave sins of adultery, sacrilege and suicide—fully acknowledging their grievousnesss and expectant of consequent damnation. His abounding love and pity for others, it is insisted, are the cause of his actions: love of mankind, love of God, justify his mistakes. The intention is evident—to get behind the look of things and show how much more subtly are the accounts of right and wrong to be kept than we might think. The point is made with great definiteness after Scobie's death has been shown up as suicide to his wife, Louise. Her 'It's no good even praying' is rebuked by Fr. Rank, who adds: 'The Church knows all the rules. But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart'. But here is a great technical slip, and one which undermines the effect of the novel. Readers of the novel *do* know what has gone on in the fictitious human heart of Scobie; they have just been told, more than told, having been situated in the consciousness of the hero, with whose responses the author has largely identified himself and, consequently, them. The reader accepts Scobie's death as the artistic conclusion as well as the chronological end of a tragedy of good intentions and grievous blundering, strongly romanticised and very inadequately analysed (comments to which I shall return), but in its way powerful and moving. He registers the death as sealing the account of his follies and sins and he responds to its stimulation of sympathy and regret—he records, that is, the nature of Scobie's errors and feels compassion at his failure—yet retains a suspense of judgment with regard to his ensuing fate, as unknowable in fact or fiction. The introduction of Fr. Rank's caution in this form and at this point merely tries to force forward into positiveness and definiteness our background feeling of compassion and suspended verdict, but in doing so it does violence to our judgment, and by demanding in effect that we dismiss all the incontrovertible evidence of wrong that *we* know of and see Scobie sainted, it at once provokes a retreat of feeling and a reiteration of the case against him; and the evidence includes his point-blank refusal to submit in the dialogue with what in effect is the voice of God. If at his death we don't know that he *won't* go to Heaven, we most certainly don't know now that he *will*, our mind insists. This is not to deny the propriety of Fr. Rank's remark in a real life situation, but to claim that here it is quite misplaced, to emphasize, in fact, that a novel is never real life, is not an *objet trouvé*—which should be the more obvious when the work in question is, like *The Heart of the Matter*, largely conducted as a form of interior monologue. There are other technical lapses in the book, information being kept up the author's sleeve in order to create surprise later and thereby first producing a spurious effect and then altering the whole reading of the scene in question. Louise, for example, on her sudden return from South Africa, makes remarks which are full of dramatic irony: 'You'll have to go to Confession this afternoon . . . Missing Mass on Sunday's a mortal sin, just as much as adultery'. We learn at the end that she knew of the love affair ('everybody was talking'), and at once the signifi-

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cance of the scene changes. This information similarly must give quite a different complexion to Scobie's visit from the apparently much disheartened Fr. Rank, which ends with Scobie's deciding not to confide his problem. 'It wasn't he', egotistically thinks Scobie, 'who required the magic word, it was the priest, and he couldn't give it'. This unsureness of technique leads one to wonder if the much graver defect of the Scobie presentation is not at least partly due to adopting the hero's viewpoint without fully realising the implications and responsibilities of the method. For from his inside position the reader can see not only more than Fr. Rank but also more than Scobie, can, in fact, see and criticise much more than the author invites him to. The case is similar to that of *The Power and the Glory*, with an even more vital failure to perform the necessary differentiation and analysis of elements in the hero, with a demand, that is, for approval of much more in Scobie than is acceptable.

From the start there is a loading of Scobie's side of the scale from which one is often inclined to demur. We first meet Louise when Scobie comes home and finds her indisposed, asleep in bed.

> 'When he found her in the bedroom under the mosquito-net she reminded him of a dog or a cat, she was so completely "out". Her hair was matted, her eyes closed . . . her hair dark and stringy with sweat. These were the times of ugliness when he loved her, when pity and responsibility reached the intensity of a passion . . . His wife was sitting up under the mosquito-net, and for a moment he had the impression of a joint of meat under a meat-cover. But pity trod on the heels of the cruel image and hustled it away'.

Surely this creates doubts about the quality of Scobie's feeling and causes one to resent the taking sympathy with him for granted and the attempt to create admiration for the pertinacity of love and kindness which can persist in the face of such difficulties. What of Scobie, one wants to ask? How does *he* look in the heat? Trivial enough, perhaps, but no less illustrative of the weakness. More important is this—after Scobie has failed to borrow the money to send Louise to South Africa;

> 'She'll wait for me to speak, and I shall try to talk about anything under the sun to postpone seeing her misery . . . He knew exactly how things would go: it had happened so often before . . . People talk about the courage of condemned men walking to the place of execution: sometimes it needs as much courage to walk with any kind of bearing towards another person's habitual misery . . .'.

As he talks on 'about anything under the sun' Louise cuts in with 'Ticki, why are you such a coward? Why don't you tell me it's all off?'—a question which goes to the root of things but which, as the scene continues, is denied by a pressure on us to agree that there is no moral cowardice but solely tenderness and the wish to spare Louise. Or again, as Scobie thinks of the survivors of the torpedoing:

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> 'The lights were showing in the temporary hospital, and the weight of all that misery lay on his shoulders. It was as if he had shed one responsibility only to take on another. This was a responsibility he shared with all human beings, but there was no comfort in that, for it sometimes seemed to him that he was the only one who recognized it. In the Cities of the Plain a single soul might have changed the mind of God'.

This sense of uniqueness, this shouldering of the whole world's weight, is surely criticizable, yet no withdrawal of assent from Scobie's feelings is hinted at. The personality presented is, in fact, a curiously egotistic, blind one, insensitive to the fulness of others' existence, prone to sentimentality, self-deceived in its very self-knowledge, and lacking in real moral courage (the import of the sacrilegious Communion is greatly reduced when one sees that it is inability to cope with Louise's importunity, a simple moral cowardice, that impels him to it)—and it is not just his love and pity that bring him to grief. Yet this is what we are given to share, and asked to accept largely at its own valuation. The mental and spiritual state of the Scobie given is not fully diagnosed in the book, and a good deal more than is brought into critical relief has to be rejected. Only with the vision of the unbalanced Scobie could one feel that the basic trouble is the abundance of a virtue. It is something subtler than that; yet while the book convincingly presents it, it does not seem to know it. The moral matter is crude and unanalysed and consequently productive of a startling and quite unacceptable palliation, indeed glamorization, of acts which are by the book's own canons grievous sins; and discernible under the theologicalized surface is the good old appeal of a romantic love for 'the other woman'. Now, the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer was not fooled by the book's direction of sympathy and flow of feeling but took Scobie just as he found him, an official who 'allows himself other professional indiscretions, not so much criminal as irresponsible, which subtly illustrate the vein of weakness and sentimentality that makes him, in spite of his industry, unsuitable for employment in a high rank'—and this despite the author's insistence on Scobie's professional merit (put beyond doubt by the eventual promotion). A total misreading of the novel, it would seem, but an interesting confirmation of the view here advanced in adverse criticism. Throughout, the life put into the feeling for Scobie comes largely from emotionally pitched writing similar to that in *The Power and the Glory*, as even the brief quotations above will suggest, with some special sources of power in areas of ready potential shock such as the scene at the altar-rails and the dialogue between Scobie and the voice of God. There is no vital development in style or technique, unless the fuller adoption of the protagonist's viewpoint be accounted such, and the high rating given the book by some can only be based upon a taste for an emotionalized and romanticized moral tale of considerable perversity of moral effect, or, as with the *Literary Supplement* reviewer, on an imperviousness

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to the movement of feeling demanded and the reading of it almost as a documentary account.

There is in *The End of the Affair* a welcome relaxing of the style from the monotonous, inflexible tenseness of the novels just discussed. (The story is told in the first person by the novelist protagonist). But though there is an easier style, and therefore. one would say, a greater range of effect to hand, the writing is still not only undistinguished but often ineffectual, imprecise, pretentious. It opens:

> 'A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead. I say 'one chooses' with the inaccurate pride of a professional writer who—when he has been seriously noted at all—has been praised for his technical ability, but do I in fact of my own will *choose* that black wet January night on the Common, in 1946, the sight of Henry Miles slanting across the wide river of rain, or did these images choose me? It is convenient, it is correct according to the rules of my craft to begin just there, but if I had believed then in a God, I could also have believed in a hand, plucking at my elbow, a suggestion, "Speak to him: he hasn't seen you yet".'

There is the placing of 'arbitrarily'; the bothersome 'that' of 'that moment' and 'at all' of 'noted at all'; 'slanting'; the confused thought of the first sentence; the affected 'it is convenient, it is correct'—to go no further. The very love affair with Henry's wife is realized in only the sketchiest novelettish terms:

> 'Is it possible to fall in love over a dish of onions? It seems improbable and yet I could swear it was just then that I fell in love. It wasn't, of course, simply the onions—it was that sudden sense of an individual woman, of a frankness that was so often later to make me happy and miserable. I put my hand under the cloth and laid it on her knee, and her hand came down and held mine in place. I said, "It's a good steak", and heard like poetry her reply, "It's the best I've ever eaten".
>
> 'There was no pursuit and no seduction. We left half the good steak on our plates and a third of the bottle of claret and came out into Maiden Lane with the same intention in both our minds. At exactly the same spot as before, by the doorway and the grill, we kissed. I said, "I'm in love".
>
> ' "Me too".
>
> ' "We can't go home".
>
> ' "No".
>
> 'We caught a taxi . . .'.

or, glaringly pretentious:

> '. . . she said . . . "I've never loved anybody or anything as I do you" . . . We most of us hesitate to make so complete a statement—we remember and we foresee and we doubt. She had

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no doubts. The moment only mattered. Eternity is said not to be an extension of time but an absence of time, and sometimes it seemed to me that her abandonment touched that strange mathematical point of endlessness, a point with no width, occupying no space. What did time matter—all the past and the other men she may from time to time (there is that word again) have known, or all the future in which she might be making the same statement with the same sense of truth?'

Sarah's diary seems a rather forced contrivance, but its real faults are in its content—here its flatness, there its strained self-consciousness and embarrassing false simplicity of feeling:

'I touched his hand: I could have sworn it was a dead hand . . . I knelt down on the floor: I was mad to do such thing . . . Maurice was dead. Extinct. There wasn't such a thing as a soul. Even the half-happiness I gave him was drained out of him like blood . . . Dear God, I said—why dear, why dear?—make me believe. I can't believe. Make me. I said, I'm a bitch and a fake and I hate myself . . . and I pressed my nails into the palms of my hands . . . I said very slowly, I'll give him up for ever, only let him be alive with a chance, and I pressed and pressed and I could feel the skin break . . . and then he came in at the door, and he was alive, and I thought now the agony of being without him starts, and I wished he was safely back dead again under the door'.

'If I believed in you, I suppose I'd believe in the immortal soul, but is that what you love? Can you really see it there under the skin? Even a God can't love something that doesn't exist, he can't love something he cannot see. When he looks at me, does he see something I can't see? It must be lovely if he is able to love it. That's asking me to believe too much, that there's anything lovely in me. I want men to admire me, but that's a trick you learn at school . . . and when they admire you, you have an illusion for a moment that there's something to admire. All my life I've tried to live in that illusion—a soothing drug that allows me to forget that I'm a bitch and a fake. But what are you supposed to love then in the bitch and the fake? Where do you find that immortal soul they talked about?'

Interesting and significant if written by a saint, but not, surely, what in a novel will create concretely the sanctification alleged.

As for the events: they are arranged to produce a conversion and two striking presumptive miracles, but these are not founded on any sufficiently created quality of being or of love in Sarah, despite Fr. Crompton's 'It seems an odd and impertinent thing to say to you, Mr. Miles, but I don't think you realize what a good woman your wife was'. In real life these miracles would reveal, would create, a new and saintly Sarah for us; in a novel they can only glorify the one presented—and it is too difficult to feel that this

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one has earned such commendation. The most convincing thing in the book is the personality of Bendrix, the novelist, who finally comes to acknowledge God—as the object of his hatred. Resentful, sour, vindictive, self-conceited and self-indulgent (at times surely not much less than evil by the book's own principles), his view is for too much of the book the authoritative one; too little of his disabling qualities is neutralized by a critical dramatization. Take his unacceptable judgments of Henry: '. . . automatically [Henry's] face fell into the absurd lines of gentleness and affection. I had always been irritated by that mechanical response to her presence . . . There was more genuine welcome, I believe, in my moments of hatred and distrust . . .'; and, 'I wanted to say to him [Fr. Crompton], You're wrong about me. He is the corrupter, not me. I wanted to defend myself, "I loved her", for surely in the Confessional they learn to recognize that emotion too'. Something has gone very sadly wrong with the technique if we are not intended to accept and to concur with these remarks; particularly as Henry near the end is made to say, 'It was a great injury I did to Sarah when I married her. I know that now'. This is a preposterous distortion of values, yet it represents fairly the final effect of contempt for the contracted marriage with the decent Henry. A recent appreciative article on the books which leniently describes Bendrix as 'second-rate' (and therefore to be discounted somewhat in his giving most notice to the showier miracles) is only mistaken in claiming that this inferiority is displayed critically—successfully. The error is that of the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer with *The Heart of the Matter*. One simply cannot accept the tribute of Sarah to Bendrix as one 'who thinks he hates, and loves, loves all the time'. As in the other books discussed the valuing instrument offered is distorted and imperfectly sensitive, and one is forced to see the book as a complete failure to do what it seems to claim to do.

While not denying to the books power and an individual approach to the ways of popular fiction, one doubts the wisdom of the general drift of acclamation in the passages quoted at the start. However creditable the attempt to infuse 'serious' life into a popular form, to give significant fictional reality to religious views common in life but not in novels, it can hardly be desirable so to take the will for the deed as to ignore the crude analysis, the obtrusive and deforming emotionalism, and the defective presentational technique which is at the least no aid in exploring and revealing the issues concerned. For Mr. Greene's eulogists to overlook these faults, not to mention the limited quality of the writing, seems regrettable. As for the 'awareness of evil': one is not sure that an eye for the unsavoury and the brutal, and a relish for them in novels, of itself betokens either moral or other insight. It depends what is done with them.

F. N. LEES.

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'KING LEAR' (I)

THE tragedies of Shakespeare's maturity, from *Macbeth* onward, are characterized by a consistent progress towards the development of dramatic symbolism. This symbolism, which derives originally from an extension of the scope and purpose of the poetic image in the dramatic scheme, implies logically a new conception of plot. The poetic image, expanding by a continually growing number of contacts with the surrounding verse, becomes more intimately and more variously related to the exigencies of story and character, until the very possibility of a sharp distinction between the action and the poetry through which its meaning in emotional and spiritual terms is conveyed, becomes inconceivable. The plot, thus conceived less in terms of common realism than as an extension of the poetry, becomes in effect itself an expanded image, the 'symbolic' reflection of an experience which the poet, following the promptings of his creative impulse, is concerned to mould into a finished artistic form.

The story of *King Lear*, in some way the most complex and deliberately constructed of all Shakespeare's great tragedies, is precisely of this kind. There is a very real sense in which the whole action of the tragedy might be described as a projection of the conflicting issues supremely present in the mind of the central protagonist. As father, Lear produces in his daughters contrasted reactions which reflect different and contradictory facets of his own mind; as king, his wilful impulses liberate forces of social anarchy which nothing less than utter exhaustion can ultimately contain. From the conflict whose dual aspect is thus concentrated in one mind the various subsidiary issues of the play radiate as partial reflections of a common image, at once contributing depth and variety to the central situation and deriving from it the subsistent unity which alone can give the complete story its full meaning. In none of Shakespeare's mature plays is the correspondence between action and motive, the external event and its inner meaning, so exactly and so significantly achieved.

Both these aspects of Lear's position, the personal and the social, contribute to the unity of a tragedy whose various stages correspond, in the external action, to a closely-knit development. The first stage in this development, occupying roughly the first two acts, is concerned with the entry of uncontrolled passion as a disruptive force into Lear's mind and with the consequent overthrow of ordered balance in himself, in his family, and in the state of whose unity he has been hitherto the royal guardian. In the second stage, which covers the central part of the play, personal disorder finds in the tempest to which the protagonists are exposed a symbol which at once reflects and transcends it; the elements at war, besides corresponding to the conflict in Lear's distraught

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person, act through the intense suffering which they impose upon him with the force of a self-revelation to become the necessary prelude to spiritual re-birth. That re-birth, however, although achieved in the personal order during the third and final stage, cannot affect Lear's external fortunes. His reconciliation with Cordelia in the fourth act is followed almost immediately by their final defeat and death against a background of almost unrelieved disaster; the personal and the social themes, hitherto so closely united, now separate to produce the concluding catastrophe, and the tragedy, after touching unprecedented heights in its treatment of the personal theme, is rounded off in a mood of Stoic acceptance.[1]

The first stage in an understanding of *King Lear* is a proper interpretation of the opening scene. The meaning of this is more than merely personal. When Cordelia, in answer to her father's implied request for flattery, follows up her uncompromising 'Nothing' with the equally direct assertion—

> I love your majesty
> According to my bond; nor more nor less,

she introduces the central conception of the whole play. The 'bond' to which she refers is, of course, far more than a legal obligation. Shakespeare's choice of the family unit for the central theme of his tragedy is in itself significant, because it implies a relationship founded most immediately upon 'blood', involving the strongest and most obscure instincts of the personality. This family relationship—and more especially the intimate tie which unites father and child—makes its first appearance as a principal theme of tragedy in *King Lear*. It dominates the plays which follow; *Pericles, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest,* and even *Cymbeline,* all turn upon a development covering estrangement, loss, and reconciliation within that relationship, and Shakespeare evidently associated it with the possibilities, both of disorder and harmony, introduced by the action of 'blood' into human experience. Lear's fatherhood, in short, bears a 'symbolic' value similar to that of Duncan's kingship in *Macbeth*. The family, like the Scottish kingdom, is a 'symbol' of ordered living. The authority of the father is balanced by the love of his children, and their devotion aspires normally to the grace of his benediction, just as Macbeth's loyalty in the earlier stages of his career is rewarded by Duncan's bounty.

The breaking-up of this pattern of reciprocal loyalties in the opening scene is presented in terms of a conflict between 'nature', the true, permanent reality of things, and the vagaries of individual temperament. Only in Cordelia are these two elements, objective

[1]Any writer on *King Lear* is bound to be aware of obligation to numerous predecessors. I should like, however, to make special reference to *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* by John F. Danby (Faber, 1949), certainly among the most suggestive of recent studies of Shakespeare. I have drawn on a few passages from my own *Approach to Shakespeare* (Paladin Press, 1939).

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'nature' and subjective impulse, truly united. For her, filial affection is a duty to be returned to the parent who has, in her own words, 'begot', 'bred', and 'loved' her, in the form of obedience, affection, and respect. Her insistence upon the 'bond', in other words, affirmed with an unyielding decision that is itself part of the family character (for Shakespeare, although not here primarily concerned with personal motive, is careful to relate the family behaviour to an appropriate psychological explanation), is based primarily upon a proper understanding of the constitution of things, and no rhetorical profession can strengthen it because it lies as a condition of health at the basis of normal human nature. Cordelia's behaviour during the whole episode, far from reflecting the stubbornness of which she has so often been accused, represents a norm, a plenitude, in relation to which the imperfect or distorted motives of the other members of the family are seen in their evident partiality.

Of this partial understanding, Lear's behaviour during this first appearance is a clear example. If Cordelia's attitude shows a fully conscious acceptance of the realities of 'nature', Lear's proper claim to the 'natural' respect owed to him as father by the children of his blood is not balanced by a corresponding understanding of his own motives. Once again—as in the case of Cordelia—the psychological exposition, within the essentially conventional framework of the story, is remarkably clear. When Lear, in his first utterance, refers to the expression of his 'darker' purpose, the adjective is carefully chosen as a first indication of the obscure, unrealized sources of the emotions which are so soon to come to the surface in the form of uncontrolled passion. More directly revealing of the reality behind this purpose is the desire, expressed almost immediately below, to 'shake all cares and business' from his age in order to crawl 'unburthened' towards death. These are indications which prepare the way for Lear's reaction to Cordelia's seeming stubbornness. We are not surprised to find, in the light of them, that old age has weakened the King's capacity for self-control, making him as soon as he is crossed the prey of an anger which is definitely rooted in the 'blood'. His response to Cordelia's firmness, when he has grasped its true seriousness, brings rapidly to the surface the obscure impulses present beneath the appearance of regal self-control which he so soon proceeds to divest with his crown. For whereas Cordelia is, in a phrase later used of her, 'queen over her passion' (IV, iii), Lear's external royalty is compatible with an intimate servitude which is the reverse of kingly. The splendid pagan imagery of the elemental fire of life and of the dark places of nature, the evocation of the orbs 'from whom we do exist and cease to be', represent the source of his anger against the 'reasonable' Cordelia, represent passion in revolt against control driving the personality to destruction. The immediate and decisive effect of his curse is, above all, to reverse the position upon which Cordelia had taken her stand. In it Lear is moved to disclaim 'propinquity and property of blood', to break bonds which precede reason and order, but upon which the unity of the family depends. The denunciation of Cordelia cul-

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minates, significantly, in the evocation, pregnant with meaning for Lear's own future, of the 'barbarous Scythian', for whom parricide was accounted a virtue, and of—

> he that makes his generation messes
> To gorge his appetite.

'Appetite', as always in Shakespeare, evokes echoes of the glutting and devouring consequences of sexual passion. Here the consequences take the form of a destruction by the parent of his own 'generation'; the light thus thrown upon Lear's own condition becomes abundantly clear in the course of his later development.

Lear's insistence, as father, upon the respect naturally due to his paternity leads, through the imperfect self-knowledge which vitiates it, to the division of his family into two parties, both of which reflect contrasted aspects of the family nature simultaneously present in himself. Both Cordelia and her sisters are evidently Lear's children. The firmness with which Cordelia clings with unadorned simplicity to the position which she rightly regards as sanctioned by 'nature' is as clearly hereditary as the passsionate devotion of her sisters to the selfish purpose which they have proposed to themselves. It is, indeed, precisely in their contrary readings of 'nature' that the difference between them lies. If Cordelia is able throughout to relate her personal behaviour to a balanced and objective conception of reality, Regan and Goneril, whilst—unlike their father—perfectly conscious of their own motives, are entirely unaware of the existence or relevance of any universal norm to which these motives may be related. In other words, whilst Cordelia's quiet insistence on the 'bond' may be said to represent the spirit of reasonable control which Lear's royal status should imply, in Goneril and Regan the passions which lurk in the darker recesses of his undifferentiated humanity are given independent life and logical consistency. The situation itself, however, is more important than the subsidiary indication of motive. If Cordelia's attitude is 'reasonable', because based on a true understanding of the nature of things, the analysis of their situation by her sisters with which the scene closes shows reason twisted out of its true orbit, reduced to the status of an instrument for the attainment of purposes essentially conceived by passion. Regan and Goneril, left to themselves after Lear's outburst, show themselves, always within the limits imposed by their imperfect grasp of what is truly 'natural', perfectly aware of what has in fact occurred. Goneril refers to her father's 'poor judgment', and Regan even more openly, relates what she calls the 'infirmity of his age' to lack of self-knowledge when she remarks with characteristic clear-sightedness that 'he hath ever but slenderly known himself'. Their understanding of what has just taken place before their eyes is, as far as it goes, complete enough; but events will show that they too, in spite of their impressive appearance of confidence, of dominating the event, share their father's incapacity to control the promptings of passion. For it is a fundamental part of the play's conception that father and

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daughters are to be regarded as complementary aspects of a *single* development within the unity of the family. Lear's initial crime against his paternity is fittingly balanced by his elder daughters' disregard of all natural feeling, and this double reversal of the order of 'nature' demands, once set afoot, a complete working-out in terms of tragic disunity.

One other aspect of this opening scene, though scarcely stressed in its development, needs to be remembered for a complete understanding of it. Lear is not only father, but King, and the bond which binds him to his children is, in a certain sense, a reflection of the more comprehensive one that embraces him to his subjects. The breaking of the more intimate bond, indeed, is reflected—though the full meaning of this scarcely appears until the action is further developed—in the disorder which Lear's folly lets loose upon the state. At this stage the political theme, still strictly secondary to the personal conflict, is mainly indicated through the person of Kent. To Cordelia's interpretation of the duties which bind her to her father, in fact, corresponds Kent's devotion to truth, regarded by him as the highest expression of his loyalty to his King. His allegiance, indeed, is of the kind which holds its best service to consist in honest independence of judgment—

> Think'st thou that duty should have dread to speak,
> When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's bound,
> When majesty stoops to folly;

but that 'allegiance' itself, when directly invoked by his master, exacts obedience is, for him, a truth not open to question. The aphoristic tone of so much of Kent's commentary in this scene is a sign both of his wisdom and of the more than personal sources from which that wisdom springs. Cordelia's devotion to the family 'bond' and Kent's acceptance of 'allegiance' are, in fact, twin aspects of the ordered sanity in which Lear's passion has opened a breach. The breaking of the more intimate relationships contains within itself the causes which, when projected on a vaster background, lead to the disruption of the social unity which provides the play with its 'universe'; but both proceed from the original breach opened by Lear's passion in the fabric of natural relationships, the evil consequences of which must work themselves out, as in *Macbeth*, through sorrow, disruption, and anarchy.

Having thus set forth in the opening scene the central tragic situation Shakespeare proceeds to provide what might be described as a comment upon it in the form of a parallel story. The use of a subsidiary plot to take, as it were, some of the weight off the main tragedy is developed in *King Lear* further than in any other play. The story of Gloucester and his two sons, Edgar and Edmund, is clearly parallel to that of Lear and his daughters. Indeed, the views ascribed by Edmund to Edgar in the 'letter' which he brings to Gloucester's attention are closely related to the central tragic situation. Its opening words—'This policy and reverence of age

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makes the world bitter to the best of our times'—as well as the view that 'sons, at perfect age, and fathers declining, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue' are little more than a rationalization of the opinions more passionately, instinctively, held by Regan and Goneril. The introduction of this parallel story serves in part to extend the scope of the original situation, to provide an instrument for the working out of the public as distinct from the private theme, and in part to bring out the deeper implications of Lear's own behaviour. Edmund, in short, gives both rational consistency and public significance to an attitude which proceeded in Lear from instinct and of the universal implications of which he was entirely unaware.

The relationship between father and children in the two families is evidently very different. Gloucester is, of course, a very different kind of father from Lear. His vanity, far from being that of a King, is that of a courtier, a man accustomed to conformity and ready, as the opening dialogue of the play shows, to adopt a consciously witty and 'worldly-wise' attitude to his son's bastardizing. Unlike Lear, he is a passive element in the creation of the conditions of his own tragedy which are essentially of Edmund's contriving. Edmund, on the other hand, like Cordelia (and like no one else in the play), shows from the outset a 'philosophy' of his own based on a consistent reading of 'nature'. Reacting against 'legitimacy' in the name of 'nature', he gives a rational substance to the second of the two positions whose conflict is the theme of the tragedy. Cordelia's acceptance as supremely 'natural' of the 'bond' that unites parent to child and is, in a sense, the reflection of universal order is set against Edmund's contrary reading of 'nature' in the light of his own origins. The law of 'nature' is replaced, in Edmund's view, by the prejudice of 'legitimacy', itself a mere product of the 'plague of custom', of the 'curiosity of nations' based upon nothing tangible or living in the order of things as interpreted by the dispassionate intelligence. Acting upon this interpretation of reality, Edmund first reverses the normal foundations of family life and then, with the unchecked craving for power that springs from his 'unprejudiced' views, disrupts the accepted order of the state.

Edmund's own declaration of belief in his first speech, however, shows him to be the enemy, not only of 'custom', of accepted usage, but—in his own despite—of reason itself. The connection of rationalism with a disruptive force founded ultimately upon the 'blood' is as clear in Edmund as it was formerly in Iago. His sense of the vitality derived from 'the lusty strength of nature' brings the immediacy of life to the otherwise flat, assured surface of his reflections; it reminds us, indeed, in the intensity which underlies its superficial detachment, of Iago's 'blood'-inspired cynicism. The argument appeals, in the last resort, to 'life', to the spontaneous display of energy, as an ultimate justification. From Edmund's standpoint, there is more life in the natural-born bastard than in the child born in the 'dull, stale, tired bed' of normal wedlock, ' 't ween sleep and wake'; for his reason accepts 'blood' alone as

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natural and life-giving, and his vitality rejoices in the attack on the established law which is the external manifestation of the 'bond'. It is this attitude which brings life, in terms of a vivid raciness of speech rhythm, to his jejune opening pledge of service to the 'goddess' nature, modifying its brisk, competent prosiness first to the easy, contemptuous familiarity of 'some twelve or fourteen moonshines lag of a brother' and, later, to the vivid sexual punning with which he rounds off his declaration. The contrast, in terms of linguistic vitality and poetic organization, between the surface energy of Edmund's utterances and the emotional completeness associated with Cordelia and gradually built up in her by exposure to experience, is essential to the whole play.

Behind Edmund's apparent self-sufficiency there lies, indeed, a remarkable contradiction. Like Iago his use of reason, which bears fruit in the seeming rationality of his claim to an unprejudiced reading of experience, is itself a product of the passion which inspires him to revolt against sanctions which have, for him, no relationship to the sources of instinctive life. His intrigues, the product of the 'invention' in which he takes such pride, produce in Gloucester a reaction, similar, at least in so far as its roots are passionate, to that of Lear in the previous scene and observable in his own senile impatience: 'I would *unstate* myself to be in a due resolution'. *Unstate*: that is, deliberately divest himself of order, hierarchy, control; the verb is full of meaning in view of later developments, and Edmund relates it to its emotional source when he refers to 'the raging heat of his displeasure'. Once more, as always in ***Lear,*** situation precedes character in significance. Edmund's 'philosophy', with its appearance of objectivity covering uncontrolled impulse, is itself the product of the breaking of the 'bond' which led originally to his begetting. A child of Gloucester's own disordered passion, traces of which survive to undo him in his senility, his destruction of the filial bonds imposed by 'nature' is a consequence of the 'natural' manner of his conception. The relation of Gloucester to his two sons, in fact, constitute a study, one of several in *Lear*, of the complexity implied in the term 'nature'. Edmund's 'natural' bastardizing destroys the still more natural relationship between the father and his true-born son; in the same way passion, though 'natural' to the full development of man, may yet wreck the harmony of his experience and destroy his peace.

The dialogue between Edmund and Gloucester is brought to a close by the latter's consideration of 'these late eclipses' and by his son's caustic comment. These at once illustrate further the peculiar combination of clear-sightedness and sensual prejudice which constitutes Edmund's 'philosophy' and give them a cosmic background as part of an inevitable and universal tendency to anarchy and decay:

> '. . . love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 't wixt son and father . . . . We have seen the best of

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our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery and all *ruinous disorders* follow us disquietly to our graves'.

The pessimism of the speech reflects a general mood in Jacobean thought, for the drama of these years is full of it; but Shakespeare, as usual, reflects the mood in the light of his own individuality and relates it to the developing pattern of his play. All the consequences derived by Gloucester from the celestial signs are about to be reflected in the logical unfolding of the tragic consequences of the original reversal of natural relationships; and the sum of them all is 'disorder', the reversal of 'degree' which initiates the tragic process and projects itself as anarchy in the family, in society, in 'nature' itself. Edmund's reaction is a curious, and characteristic, blend of common-sense and lack of deeper understanding. Holding that the promptings of 'nature' are limited to the following of the purposes proposed by the will and that the existence of any external check upon these promptings is inconceivable, he rightly stresses the weakness, the evasion of responsibility, implied in his father's words, at the same time as he indicates—short-sightedly—his own contempt for the traditional conceptions of 'natural' behaviour. His way of expressing this contempt, however, is in itself revealingly personal. Deriding, in the impulse of his own self-confident sensuality, the attitude of those who, like Gloucester, ascribe man's attraction to evil to the action of forces beyond his control—those who are 'drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence', evil 'by a divine thrusting on'—he stresses his own self-sufficiency in characteristically sensual terms: 'I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing'. Edmund's criticism is justified, but his own attitude depends, beneath its show of pure rationality, on an impulse of the 'blood'; the friction between these two elements in his make-up, besides producing the irony typical of his character, largely underlies the tragic situations of the play.

The situation thus set forth in these parallel opening episodes works out its consequences, in terms of disruption and disunity, during the course of the first two Acts. During these the descent into anarchy, personal and public, steadily gathers momentum, whilst accumulating indications point to the fundamental inversions of the tempest scenes, the central core of the play. The first sign of the coming tragedy (I, iii) follows logically from Lear's abdication of his royal responsibilities. Lear, it should never be forgotten, is King as well as father; as such, he bears both the privileges and the duties of 'authority', and due weight must be given to Goneril's assertion that his passionate irresponsibility 'sets us all at odds' and that the 'riotousness' of his retinue is a sign of weakening control. Her statement that her father

> still would manage those authorities
> That he hath given away,

pitiless though it is in the implications she derives from it, is true

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enough. Part at least of Lear's tragedy—the 'public' aspect, we may call it, as opposed to the personal tragedy that centres on his conception of the family—follows from his behaviour as King. His act in abdicating his responsibilities covers a definite assumption that the pleasures of power, capriciously enjoyed by an old man not yet conscious of his weakening faculties, can be divorced from its reponsibilities. His first words at his next appearance, 'Let me not stay a jot for dinner!', the outraged vanity with which he responds to his treatment by Goneril's messenger (I, iv), are certainly examples of the frailty with which power, in this case, has till recently been borne. Lear's abdication logically releases a corresponding egoism in those whom an ordered conception of social relationships regards as freely subdued to authority. The behaviour of his knights is one example of this; another, still, more significant, is the passionate expression of Goneril's contempt. The spirit of that contempt makes itself felt in the nervous vigour and sensuous immediacy of her speech. 'He *flashes* into one *gross* crime or other': 'If he *distaste* it, let him to our sister': 'I would *breed* from hence occasions'; in such expressions, a force whose basic sensuality is controlled by nothing more than the will which impels it to follow its own interests is feeling its way towards unchecked activity.

To these developments is opposed, simultaneously, the attitude of Kent, stressing by contrast the reasonable, the truly 'natural' attitude of the subject to his King. When Kent tells Lear, on being asked why he wishes to serve him, that 'you have that in your countenance which I would fain call master', and when this quality turns out to be 'authority', he is taking up a position that runs counter to what is already coming to be the prevailing development in the world around him. It is, in fact, a right, a normal social relationship that is being stressed. Kent's attitude corresponds, in the public sphere, to that of Cordelia in her interpretation of the duties of a daughter. Both are plain-speaking where matters of principle or judgment are concerned. Cordelia's lack of the 'glib and oily art' of flattering speech is fairly balanced by Kent's pride in his ability to 'deliver a plain message bluntly'. His confession of principles is indeed a summary of the virtues which find their highest expression in true loyalty; the determination to be consistent with his own nature ('to be no less than I am'), to show and expect fair-dealing ('to love him that is honest'), to reflect more than to speak ('to converse with him that is wise and says little'), above all, to cling to traditional sanctions of moral behaviour ('to fear judgment'), are all qualities which the world around him, encouraged by the example set by its lawful ruler, is busily engaged in inverting. Kent's plainness is founded in the first place upon a conscious maturity of judgment which reveals itself most typically in a domination of sensual impulse—at forty-eight, he affirms that he is 'not so young' as 'to love a woman for singing, nor so old to dote on her for anything'—but at the back of it lies a clear conception of natural order, a belief that true authority needs to be exercised (and accepted) if chaos and tragedy are to be avoided. The fundamental

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frivolity of Lear's answer to his offer of service—'if I like thee no worse after dinner, I will not part from thee yet'—is an indication of the extent to which this same authority has been undermined by personal flaws of character; it will not be long before the association of Kent and Lear, far from depending on the royal caprice, will be founded exclusively upon the servant's sense of loyalty.

If Kent, in his relation to Lear, begins to bring out the public, we might almost say the political implications of the coming tragedy, yet another facet of the situation, and more especially of Lear's mind, receives illumination at this point by the introduction of the Fool. The Fool serves, indeed, as a kind of chorus commenting upon the downward progress of his master's fortunes, which he accompanies to their lowest point, and then disappears. His comments, however, cannot be described as introducing an independent vision into the play. They represent rather submerged aspects of Lear's own thought, truths present in his mind but discarded as contrary to his desires, and only here emerging in clipped and enigmatic forms. Unlike Kent, the Fool has no positive spiritual contribution—unless we count the fact of his loyalty, which contradicts all his own declared principles, at the height of Lear's tragedy—to make to an understanding of the action which he observes. His comments, generally couched in proverbial and rather ambiguous forms, reflect rather a keen sense of the way of the world than any logical hope that the course of things may be changed; at best, his heart prompts him to pity and this in turn to a kind of unreflecting loyalty in the face of circumstances which his head can in no sense justify. The only kind of advice which he can rationally offer by drawing on the unchanging, disillusioned sources of popular wisdom is that sufficiently reflected in the first of his elliptic rhymes:

> Have more than thou showest,
> Speak less than thou knowest,
> Lend less than thou owest,
> Ride more than thou goest,
> Learn more than thou trowest,
> Set less than thou throwest;
> Leave thy drink, and thy whore,
> And keep in-a-door,
> And thou shalt have more
> Than two tens to a score.

There is about the 'wisdom' of this characteristic advice, the first introduction of a social theme which will later come to play an important part in Lear's developing consciousness, nothing distinctively spiritual. It is, in reality, simply a compendium of the moral principles followed by the new rich of the time in their progress to power; thrift, temperance, and a distrust of the more generous human impulses are the supreme virtues, and the successful practice of usury is their reward. The only factor that distinguishes the Fool's expression of these contemporary commonplaces is the curiously

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wry, acid concentration with which they are uttered, and the use of deliberately monotonous rhyme to deprive them of all moral attractiveness. The Fool, in short, is uttering worldly wisdom as he, and the anonymous generations of the people, see it with the eyes of reason; but the observation of facts, and a keen sense of coming developments, prevent him from identifying himself with the opinions he has himself uttered, leaving him with the sense of contradiction between head and heart that finds such peculiar expression in his utterance.

Conceived in such a spirit, the Fool's comments are scarcely likely to be encouraging. They reduce the whole action to a contrast between gratuitous folly, on the one hand, and the cold-blooded following of self-interest on the other. Kent is, in worldly terms, a fool for allying himself to Lear's declining fortunes; Lear is also a fool, and in greater measure, for having given all to his daughters, and may expect to be repaid, as the world repays, with ingratitude. In general, the Fool's speech implies, in its very form of expression, a reversal of reason, of logic, which at once reflects the state into which Lear's initial action has plunged that part of the universe which depends upon him for its ordered functioning, and catches, through this very methodical reversal of normality, its own peculiar glimpse of truth. 'This fellow'—he says of Lear—'hath banished two on's daughters, and done the third a blessing against his will'. In fact, of course, Lear has banished only Cordelia, leaving his elder daughters with the 'blessing' which he imparted on them with his kingdom; but the tragic process, by the time it is complete, will show that the gift was a prelude to ruin, whilst the banishment could indeed be regarded, in spite of the almost intolerable sufferings imposed, as preparatory to the 'blessing' which Cordelia eventually receives (IV, vii) from her father. A little further on, when Lear unconsciously echoes, with his 'nothing can be made of nothing', his original 'Nothing will come of nothing' (I, i) to Cordelia, the Fool's comment 'tell him, so much the rest of his land comes to' drives the parallel effectively home through the use of paradox.

If the observations of the Fool, generally couched in the forms of a disillusioned proverbial wisdom, serve to provide a comment on Lear's folly, they also anticipate, by repeated turns of enigmatic phrase, aspects of the coming tragedy. When he tells Kent, 'nay, an thou canst not smile as the wind sits, thou'lt catch cold shortly', he at once stresses Kent's inability to flatter, indicates the unwisdom in worldly terms of his attitude, and relates it to the exclusion from comfortable society and the exposure to the elements which it will shortly bring him. A similar reference to the future may be detected in the bitter observation upon truth, 'the dog' that 'must to kennel', 'whipped out, when Lady the brach may stand by the fire and stink'. Remarks of this kind, still distant and enigmatic, will become clearer and more frequent as the tragedy rises to its climax, merging finally as one element into the evocation of the storm by which its diverse elements are finally fused into one tremendous dramatic image.

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At this point, the scope of the original situation having been thus widened by the incorporation of Kent and the Fool, we reach the next decisive stage in the action: the confronting of Lear with Goneril, during which the division introduced into the family unity by his unbalanced act comes to its open expression. Goneril's attitude is from the first strictly 'reasonable', not to say moralizing; she refers in bitter terms to the 'licence' of the Fool and to the 'rank' and intolerable rioting of Lear's followers, defending her demands in terms of justified censure and 'discreet proceeding'. Behind her indignation, however, there lies a new and ominous sense of conscious power, which the Fool, whose comments at this point are closely adjusted to the struggle taking shape before him, is quick to point out. Through his eyes, indeed, the morality upon which Goneril takes her stand appears as a reflection of that to which he has already referred, which exalts calculated thrift, as an instrument of self-advancement and the acquisition of power, to the status of a supreme virtue. Even before she has spoken, he greets her with—

> Mum, mum:
> He that keeps nor crust nor crumb,
> Weary of all, shall want some,

and the commentary with which he accompanies the following clash of wills brings out the inversion of traditional values which the new code implies. After reducing Goneril's bitter reproof to its basic reality by his reference to the cuckoo brought up in the hedge-sparrow's nest, he shows himself aware that the light of reason, at least in its traditional meaning, is about to be extinguished; his 'out went the candle', and we were left 'darkling' is the first of a number of references, increasing in number and cumulative in effect, to a future full of foreboding. Goneril's frigid appeal to Lear's 'good wisdom' he proceeds to reduce similarly to what it is, the inversion of an 'order' which the new reason does not recognize, but which is itself the only possible check against that same reason's tendency to see nothing beyond the pursuit of its own interests: 'May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse?' Finally, after telling Lear bluntly that his abdication has left him no more than the 'shadow' of his former self, he stresses the reversal of the truly natural relationship between father and daughter by prophesying that Goneril and her sister will make of Lear 'an obedient father' in the near future. Throughout this exchange, we are aware of the Fool's characteristic hesitation between what he knows to be natural and therefore right, and the conviction, born of observation, that in the struggle between might and right all the advantages are in the hands of the usurper. This conviction is more than borne out in all that part of the play's action in which he figures and of which he may be regarded, in a sense, as the expressed consciousness.

Meanwhile the conflict between 'reason', divorced of its roots in natural relationship, and a paternity which has abandoned the prerogatives upon which such relationships, in the family, rest,

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proceeds towards a final break. Goneril, in her ostentatious, competent 'rightness' makes typical use of morality as the disguise of power. She describes Lear's followers as 'debosh'd and bold' and refers to the 'epicurism and lust' which have turned her 'graced palace' (the adjective, characteristically applied to monarchy by Shakespeare in his plays from *Macbeth* onwards, rings hollow in her mouth) into a 'tavern or a brothel'. The true substance of what she says, however, lies not here, but in her ominous remark—made by one conscious of the power which Lear himself has put into her hands—that she is one who, if crossed, is ready to 'take the thing she begs', To this appeal to a reason conceived in the function of self-interest and the barely-disguised craving for power Lear responds with an outburst of passion, the dangerous nature of which is expressed in his typical oath 'Darkness and devils!' After referring to Goneril as 'degenerate bastard' (the words are an anticipation of the fateful curse shortly to come) he recognizes for the first time, albeit in passing and still confusedly, the error produced in his judgment by Cordelia's 'small fault' of stubbornness which, in his own words,

> wrench'd my frame of nature
> From the fixed place.

The phrase is full of meaning in its illumination of the central conception of the play. 'The fixed place' is the normal, the natural order in which paternal love is met by filial devotion, in which reason recognizes the proper claims, based on 'love', of the most profound of all human relationships. Passion, acting like an 'engine', a rack of torture, has 'wrenched' the 'frame' of normal feeling from its true expression and engendered a monstrosity as the rationalized reflection of its own image; the consequences of this distortion have still to be worked out in the body of the tragedy.

For the moment, however, this passing recognition of error has no bearing upon Lear's subsequent behaviour. His resentment against Cordelia had been itself inspired by passion, by a revolt against control which drove his personality towards destruction. The full effects of his former disclaimer of 'propinquity and property of blood' now emerge in his passionate reaction against a 'reason', now itself deliberately self-seeking and self-determined, but which is none the less, in a very real sense, the child of his own error. It is the awareness of this error, indeed, and his refusal to admit it, that account between them for the explosion of violence which now takes charge of his whole being. Appealing to 'nature' he prays, in a decisive utterance, that the natural fertility of his own daughter be suspended:

> Into her womb convey sterility:
> Dry up in her the organs of increase,
> And from her derogate body never spring
> A babe to honour her.

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This curse, which proceeds from passion and calls upon 'nature', the source of instinct and spontaneous feeling, is none the less an attack on the natural fulfilment of passion; that is the heart of Lear's tragedy. The full extent of his departure from normal feeling is apparent, a little later, when we find him in his incoherent rage anticipating his reception by Regan. *She*, he is certain, is 'kind and comfortable'; for that reason, on hearing of Goneril's behaviour—

> with her nails
> She'll flay thy wolfish visage.

This development of moral unreason in Lear is a clear sign of the tragic consequences wrought by passion in his nature. Its development is paralleled in his daughters. Indeed, father and daughter are to be regarded from the first as complementary aspects of a single development within the unity of the family; Lear's crime against his paternity is fitly balanced by his daughter's disregard of all natural feeling, and this leads them logically to turn against one another over Edmund in the following of individual desire. 'Blood', upon which their apparently rational cruelty is grounded, makes them eventually rivals for the love of the bastard son of Gloucester, and so prepares for their ruin. Once more, as in *Othello* and *Macbeth*, the evil elements of passion work themselves out to their natural conclusion, which is absolute disruption.

It is not surprising, after this episode, that the images and phrases foreshadowing the coming tragedy at once become more frequent and group themselves significantly by repetition. This grouping of significant images round succeeding events which serve, so to speak, as points of attraction is characteristic of the play's construction; there is a very real sense in which the whole plan of *King Lear* turns, as a vortex round its centre, upon a fundamental inversion of situation, which reaches its point of greatest intensity in the tempest scenes. This inversion, with all the stresses that accompany it, is now in process of formation. The split between Goneril and her husband, here anticipated for the first time, introduces a new element into the pattern. Albany, left alone with Goneril after Lear's departure, shows misgivings about the wisdom of her actions. He is first systematically ignored and answered finally by sneers at his mildness and by a ruthless affirmation of self-sufficiency:

> Let me still take away the harms I fear,
> Not fear still to be taken.

Albany, however, continues to doubt, and expresses himself in an indication of the relativity of human vision that will later become one of the main themes of the tragedy.

> How far your eyes may pierce I cannot tell;
> Striving to better oft we mar what's well.

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The use of rhyme to underline certain moral sentences, generally of common acceptance, has characterized *King Lear* since the opening scene, where Kent, in particular, states the commonplaces of loyal behaviour with similar forthrightness. Here Goneril's superficial quality of unprejudiced insight is set against just such a proverbial expression of collective wisdom. Her treatment of Lear has been based on the conviction that 'nature' can be 'bettered' in the following of self-interest; Albany doubts this, and expresses himself by referring to the relativity of human perception in terms of sight. The sharp-sightedness of Goneril—repeatedly ascribed to her through the play—may not, in fact, penetrate as far as it seems. It is at this point, indeed, that the sight-image begins to be echoed insistently in terms which find their objective correlation ultimately in the blinding of Gloucester (III, vii). Lear, for example, declares his readiness to 'pluck out' his 'old fond eyes'; whilst the Fool, a little further down (I, v), remarks that a man's eyes were given him so that what 'he cannot smell out' (the phrase is suggestive in its indication of evil and corruption) 'he may spy into'. Side by side with this, and equally anticipating the future course of events in a different direction, the Fool asks Lear 'why a snail has a house', and hints that, by giving away his authority (his 'house') to his daughters he has left 'his horns without a case'. Authority, in the Fool's world, is the guarantee of protection against the pressure of rival egoisms, and he who short-sightedly divests himself of this guarantee must expect to find himself defenceless. The final realization of this in the 'hovel' in which Lear and his companions will eventually be driven to shelter their 'houseless poverty' (III, iv) is still remote; but the track of imagery leading to it has already been laid down, and side by side with it Lear's first ominous reference to madness. 'I would not be mad!' he exclaims, under the pressure of the Fool's utterance of his own innermost misgivings, and mentions for the first time what is to become in the tempest episode the heart of the tragedy.

The Second Act of King Lear is concerned, in the main, to develop further the situations already defined. It opens (II, i) with a noticeable deepening in the atmosphere of obscure foreboding which already begins to surround the main action. We hear at the outset of 'likely wars' between Cornwall and Albany, the first hint at the divisions which grow inevitably, in the familiar Shakespearean manner, out of the original reversal of the normal basis of authority. Although these are as yet 'whispered', 'ear-kissing arguments', the very secrecy which enshrouds them is ominous, as is the insistence upon darkness as a cloak covering Cornwall's movements which are thought to be connected with them; he is coming 'this night', 'now, i' the night, i' the haste', and, as we learn from Regan herself before the end of the scene, 'threading dark-eyed night'. Once more these scattered and seemingly accidental repetitions have their part to play in the developing pattern; they link up with the disastrous revelation already made of Lear's 'darker purposes' and with his repeated invocations of obscure natural forces, and,

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together with these, look forward to the end of the act when, in Gloucester's words, 'night comes on' as Regan and her sister prepare to exclude their father from shelter and thus finally confirm their reversal of all normal human feeling. Once again, the tremendous encounter of human nature with reality which is the theme underlying the symbolism of the tempest scenes is seen to be at the centre of a web of interwoven images and undercurrents which covers the whole play.

At the stage so far reached, however, these are no more than premonitions. They serve as a background for the dialogue in which Edmund, caricaturing the natural doctrine of the 'bond' that unites the family in mutual sympathy and respect, convinces Gloucester of his own filial devotion and of Edgar's 'unnatural purpose'. In his reference to the 'revenging gods' and to their abhorrence of parricide, above all, he states in ironic terms the very doctrines which his own contrary interpretation of 'nature' is determined to overthrow. He receives in return, from his morally blinded father and not without an underlying reference to his own bastardizing, the praise implied in 'loyal and *natural* boy'. Edmund, 'natural' by birth, is in fact being commended for the possession of that very loyalty which a philosophy entirely opposed to his own associates with 'nature', with full normality in human behaviour. The knot of moral contradictions with which this play is concerned is here, as ever, reaching out to its linguistic correlative. In the moral night which at this point begins to envelop the action, opposed conceptions of 'nature', often wrapped in words which convey meanings opposite to those held by those who speak them, are moving towards the tragic resolution.

This and the following scenes (II, ii, iii), in which Kent is condemned to the stocks and Edgar announces his determination to take the 'basest and most poorest shape' by which man was ever 'brought near to beast', are preludes to the next stage in Lear's downward process—his meeting with Regan. Kent's encounter with Oswald is made the occasion for a contrast between the loyal servant and the time-seeking flatterer, or, in Kent's own terms, between man as formed by 'nature' and the creation of a 'tailor'; it is worth remembering that the difference between essential man and the clothed creation of fashion is referred to elsewhere in the play, and finds its fullest expression, like so much else, in Lear's reaction to the storm. For the rest, the episode shows the beginning of the adversities to which the good, the loyal, and the merely 'natural' are henceforth to be subjected in increasing measure; in Kent's case these adversities are met with some confidence that they are not final—

> Nothing almost sees miracles
> But misery (II, ii)

and with an indication that the remedies of this 'enormous state' may be looked for at Cordelia's hands. From Lear's loyal servant in the stocks we pass for a moment (II, iii) to Edgar's expression of

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his determination to assume the first of the various disguises in which, according to his personal fortunes, he reflects successively the various stages in the development of the play; his explicit references to 'penury' and 'nakedness', to lunacy and to the potential presence of the 'beast' in man will all find their realization later in the play.

Lear's next appearance, in the episode which will bring him finally face to face with the real facts of the situation he has brought upon himself, is accompanied, as ever, by the pertinent commentary of the Fool. This dwells increasingly upon anticipations of the coming reversal of worldly fortunes. 'Winter's not gone yet, if the wild geese fly that way' he comments on hearing Kent's account of his treatment by Cornwall; and he follows this up, when Kent asks why Lear is so poorly attended, by remarking that 'there's no labouring i' the winter'. The Fool, in fact, observes the course of events with his habitual disillusioned common-sense, making no extravagant claim to exceptional insight; for, in his own words, 'there's not a nose among twenty but can smell him that's stinking'. The wisdom of the world, thus interpreted, has nothing to offer Lear in the shape of encouragement; for it prompts a man, in the Fool's personal application of the familiar image of the wheel of Fortune, to relax his hold 'when a great wheel runs down a hill', but to cling to 'the great one that goes up the hill', and so to make his own position secure in the shadow of greatness. In the world as the Fool envisages it, with social differences reduced—to echo once again his own words—to a contrast between 'bags' and 'rags', he whose only trust is in the mutations of Fortune, 'that arrant whore', is poor indeed. Circumstances, according to the Fool's philosophy, help those who are in a position to help themselves; the rest, in a society exclusively devoted to the acquisition of wealth and the power which accompanies it, have only resignation open to them. In the light of this disillusioned clear-sightedness, the whole course of Lear's future tragedy is already apparent.

This application to Lear's fortunes of a pessimistic reading of human motives clashes, however, in the Fool's own words, with a contrary sentiment, indefinable in terms of common-sense but capable of affecting, almost in spite of himself, the speaker's choice of his own course of action. Having given his advice he casts doubt, in a concluding phrase, not only upon its morality but upon its wisdom; for, he says, 'I would have none but knaves follow it, since a fool gives it'. The ambivalence of heart and head thus established, with neither term clearly defined or separated from its supposed opposite, is indeed characteristic. It is typical of the Fool to hesitate, when he specifically directs his advice to knaves, between practical realism and a generosity of impulse which seems to contradict it; it is equally typical of him to suggest that the advice itself may not be so indisputable as it seems, since—after all—he is a Fool who gives it. The same complexity is apparent in the very couplet with which he rounds off his utterance, in which the storm' to which Lear is shortly to be exposed as a result of the

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desertion of his interested followers is openly referred to. In the coming tempest, however, the Fool, in spite of his dispassionate advice just given declares that he 'will tarry', will not be among those who desert their master for gain. By so doing, he qualifies for the description of 'fool' in the worldly, as well as in the technical sense:

> But I will tarry; the fool will stay;
> And let the wise man fly:
> The knave turns fool that runs away;
> The fool no knave, perdy.

Once more the Fool's wry versified patter ends on an unexpected note of contradiction. Although it is, in the light of his own recently proffered advice folly for him to cling to Lear's declining fortunes when the 'wise man' flies, the final couplet suggests that, from another point of view, the 'wise man' is not only a 'knave', but, in the last resort, possibly himself a 'fool'; whereas the Fool, whatever his temporal fortunes may be—and all the external signs, like the flight of the wild geese in a single direction, lead us to expect the worst—escapes the charge of 'knavery' which falls upon his worldly betters. There exists, in fact, a distinction between head and heart, between rational common-sense and moral feeling, which corresponds to the conflict between the two readings of 'nature' as order, harmony, and as the unchecked following of self-interest, with which Lear's own tragedy is mainly concerned.

Meanwhile, the unsettlement in Lear of his previously established values begins to take shape in the form of an uncontrollable outburst of passion. From the first an unusual degree of emotional tension has been an essential part of his character. At their best his emotions find their natural expression, as befits his kingly office, in powerful affirmations of genuine regality. When he refers, in his first speeches, to 'our *largest* bounty' and to 'this *ample* third of our fair kingdom', the choice of epithet is clearly moved by a spirit of overflowing bounty similar to that which irradiates from Duncan in *Macbeth*. In other phrases uttered almost simultaneously, however, the pressure of forces only partly covered by the appearance of kingly control can be felt in a repeated tendency to gather together phrases such as—

> . . . rule,
> Interest of territory, cares of state . . .
> . . . space, validity, and pleasure . . .
> . . . paternal care,
> Propinquity and property of blood . . .

in a series of authoritative gestures which cover a cumulative surge of emotional effect. With the external forms of royal dignity by now irreparably weakened, the pent-up feelings hitherto held in check begin to find other, less coherent forms of expression. A 'climbing sorrow', whose 'element's below', begins to 'swell up' towards his heart; it will first overthrow his reason and then, by

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making him accessible to deeper springs of feeling, open up new sources of understanding. For the moment his indignation is still mainly superficial in its impulses. He sees the absence of Regan and Cornwall merely as an affront to his authority, 'the images of revolt and flying off', and ignores his own folly which has made his present situation possible. To the evocation by Gloucester of the 'fiery quality' of Cornwall, he replies with an indignation that itself proceeds from his 'breath and blood'. In these explosions of passion, Lear is still the headstrong old man of the opening scene; but, interwoven with his anger, is a growing consciousness of his own physical weakness, and it is here that we become aware in his mind of the first glimpses of self-understanding. He begins by seeking in illness for a possible explanation of Cornwall's behaviour:

> Infirmity doth still neglect all office
> Whereto our health is bound; we are not ourselves
> Where nature being oppressed commands the mind
> To suffer with the body.

Behind this explanation there lies a kind of reflection of Lear's own state. He refers, just below, to that 'more headier will' which has contributed so much to the position in which it now finds itself, and which the suspicion, now definitely entered into his thoughts, that he is helpless, causes him to begin to reconsider. We are following, on the one hand, the break-up of an apparently strong and effective personality and, on the other, catching the first intermittent glimpses of self-knowledge. The supposed acts of Cornwall's passionate wilfulness, here interpreted by Lear in terms of his own character, are conceived of as 'indisposed' and 'sickly', aberrations from normal 'nature'.

The following encounter between Lear and Regan gradually works up to a climax with the appearance of Goneril and with the complete agreement reached between the sisters. Regan opens reasonably enough, in a noticeably quieter vein than her sister. Her appeal to reason does not immediately appear as the ruthless assertion of self-interest that it really is:

> O, sir, you are old;
> Nature in you stands on the very verge
> Of her confine; you should be ruled and led
> By some discretion that discerns your state
> Better than you yourself.

Lear, still concentrating on the treatment he has suffered at Goneril's hands, is slow to see the true purpose concealed by Regan's relatively pliable exterior expressions. He sees in her a 'tender-hefted nature', eyes which—unlike those of her sister, which are 'fierce' and 'burn'—may yet offer 'comfort', show more deferences to the 'offices of nature'. The note of pathos struck in his address to her represents something new in his character, which we may associate with his new awareness of age—'Dear daughter, I confess that I am

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old'—and its material superfluousness—

> Age is unnecessary: on my knees I beg
> That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food.

In stating these new glimpses of reality, the first product of the shock which Goneril has inflicted upon him, Lear places himself significantly in the position of an actor. His words express what he wishes to believe is impossible, what he could not bear to admit in full seriousness; but the very eagerness of his approach to Regan is a sign of his desire to have his innermost thoughts disproved, to find in her respect, affection, and gratitude a justification of his own estimate of himself.

Regan's reply, though not immediately destructive, is not hopeful. If she meets his appeal to her with the frigid reserve of 'Good sir, to the purpose', it is because she is not yet ready to make her contribution to the shattering of her father's illusions. This must be preceded by her reunion with her sister, In the three-cornered discussion which follows Goneril's arrival, Lear's palpable breaking down into the incoherence which precedes his madness is balanced by an equally evident growth in selfish ferocity on the part of his daughters. Lear, on his side, touches with increasing frequency upon images and ideas that are shortly to be revealed as essential to the play's deeper meaning; his utterances are a strange, largely incoherent blend of new self-knowledge and wilful passion which finally breaks down into helplessness. His first reaction to Goneril's appearance is an appeal to the 'heavens' to exert their power in the enforcement of the 'natural' pieties—respect for old age and obedience to authority; their immediate reply will be the loosening upon his head of the storm. Goneril, as though encouraged by Lear's growing consciousness of old age and helplessness, presses home her advantageous position with a scornful reference to 'dotage' and 'indiscretion' which drives her father still further towards the breaking-point:

> O sides, you are too tough;
> Will you yet hold?

whilst Regan, as though plucking force from her sister's greater energy, addresses him openly from the standpoint of her superior power: 'I pray you, father, being weak, seem so'. At this point, 'reason' is clearly shedding its mask and revealing itself as the instrument of uncircumscribed and egoistic will.

Lear's passionate reply, when he asserts his preference—

> To wage against the enmity o' the air,
> To be a comrade with the wolf and owl,

if the alternative is to beg his keep, clearly brings us still another step nearer to the storm-scenes; whilst the exclamation which immediately follows—'Necessity's sharp pinch!'—introduces a theme that is shortly to play an important part in the development

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of the play. Even more important is his following farewell to Goneril, his assertion that she is at once 'my flesh, my blood, my daughter' and a 'disease that's in my flesh',

> a boil,
> A plague-sore, an embossed carbuncle,
> In my corrupted blood.

This type of imagery relates the family situation of *Lear* to a theme common throughout the whole tragic period, and generally associated with the disorders provoked by 'appetite', or sensual passion. Such passion is still alive in Lear, in spite of his age, which indeed reduces his capacity to control it; and the combination of passion of a similar kind with extreme devotion to self-interest in his daughters is the development of a flaw in the original family situation. An internal corruption is, in fact, here in the process of coming to the surface, and its manifestations are the substance of the tragedy to come.

As the sisters grow more confident that they hold the whip-hand the pressure they exert upon the weakening Lear becomes more merciless. Regan still speaks as one who claims to 'mingle reason with your passion'; she uses the respectable political argument of the danger of divided authority to gain her point—

> How in one house
> Should many people under two commands
> Hold amity?—

and, as Lear weakens, she and Goneril systematically take away the concessions originally offered. Under this extreme of pressure Lear, in his last speech before leaving, brings together in one utterance the conflicting emotions which are about, in their clash, to shatter his sanity:

> O, reason not the need: our basest beggars
> Are in the poorest thing superfluous:
> Allow not nature more than nature needs,
> Man's life as cheap as beasts: thou art a lady;
> If only to go warm were gorgeous,
> Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st
> Which scarcely keeps thee warm.

The conception of 'necessity', of the difference between 'true need' and that which passes for such in the accepted currency of society, has for some time been taking shape in Lear's distraught mind. Now, as his impotence comes finally home to him, it asserts itself in his utterance as one of the principal themes to be exposed to the clarifying action of the coming tempest. The opening protest against the kind of 'reason' which the sisters have just turned upon him merges immediately, with a consideration of what is 'true need', into the social contrast which is one of the main features of the storm scenes. The true 'nature' of man, so Lear argues, requires 'superfluity', is distinguished by it from the beast, whose subjection

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to mere necessity is a sign of the cheapness of its life. The situation, however, contains a deep ambiguity, for the same superfluity which is a sign of his superior 'nature' can easily become, in man, the attachment to the 'gorgeous', the superfluous in a pejorative sense, which leads to the contrast between luxury such as that shown by the sisters in their new pride of power and the exposed misery of the beggar, who himself, none the less, is conscious of 'superfluous' necessities. The 'superfluity' which dignifies, humanizes the one, in short, leads to the arrogance and bestiality of the other. The action of the tempest on Lear's consciousness, here once more anticipated in the reference to warmth, will be needed before he learns to attach their true value to each of these two extremes. For the moment, his utterance passes on to a prayer for 'patience', itself caused by his grief and awareness of helplessness; but to this prayer is added a new desire to penetrate the obscure purposes of the 'gods' which we shall also meet again. Thereafter the speech, under the renewed pressure of intense emotion, breaks down into a fragmentary intensity and finally into the first sinister awareness of coming madness. 'O fool, I shall go mad!'; it is no accident that this pregnant recognition, addressed to the Fool who is, in a sense, the mirror of his own broken consciousness, is followed immediately, according to the stage-directions, by the first outburst of the gathering storm.

Under the shadow of the tempest the two opposed groups finally separate themselves out. 'Let us withdraw, 't will be a storm', urges Cornwall, and Regan and her sister are not slow to invoke the justifying voice of reason in support of their interest. 'The house is little'; ' 'Tis his own blame'; it is all impeccably logical, and—at the same time—completely inhuman. 'The king', on the other hand, we are told by Gloucester, 'is in high rage'. His passions, preludes to lunacy, have gained the upper hand, and Cornwall rightly understands that, in this mood, he will be the instrument of his own destruction: ' 'Tis best to give him way; he leads himself'. In Regan's last comment, this is developed further in words which, besides echoing the characteristically selfish moralizing of the speaker, contain a truth the depth of which she is not herself aware:

> O, sir, to wilful men
> The injuries that they themselves procure
> Must be their schoolmasters.

That these words, besides the speaker's obvious disclaimer of responsibility, have a connection with Lear's own growth in self-knowledge, his development during the storm scenes will show. Meanwhile the doors are closed, and the worldly and the powerful come in, out of the 'wild night' and the storm; the way is clear, at the opening of the Third Act, for a development of the central situation of the whole tragedy.

D. A. TRAVERSI.

[*To be concluded.*]

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COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

AMERICAN CRITICISM

THE FIELDS OF LIGHT, by Reuben Arthur Brower (Oxford University Press, London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, 21/-).

MODERN POETRY AND THE TRADITION, by Cleanth Brooks (Poetry London, 12/6).

THE PERMANENCE OF YEATS, Selected Criticism, edited by James Hall and Martin Steinmann (New York, The Macmillan Company, $5.00).

CRITIQUES AND ESSAYS ON MODERN FICTION, 1920-51, Selected by John W. Aldridge (The Ronald Press Company, New York).

GERTRUDE STEIN: A BIOGRAPHY OF HER WORK, by Donald Sutherland (Yale University Press, London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, 24/-).

These five books, all of which have appeared recently in America, have more than a common country of origin to warrant their consideration in a collective survey. For one thing, the critics here represented are all very consciously critics of the enlightenment, intensely preoccupied with doing something new, with kicking over the traces of the old academic criticism and substituting a new, more precise critical technique. Thus Mr. Aldridge pleads for a 'new criticism' of the novel, and Mr. Brower sub-titles his book 'An experiment in critical reading'. Furthermore, at least four books out of the five may be expected to have, and already to have had, considerable influence on American students of literature. The volumes by Mr. Brooks and Mr. Brower have almost a text-book structure, and of the two weighty compilations Mr. Aldridge's is explicitly 'designed for use as a primary text in courses in the criticism of modern fiction, and as a collateral text in courses in the survey of modern fiction'. These books, then, may be taken as a reasonable guide to modern American critical method and opinion, a pointer to the kind of intellectual audience the writers assume, and an indication of the sort of result one may expect from their influence on literary students.

One may assert directly that Mr. Brower's book is by a long way the best of the set. It is serious and painstaking, and, above all, certain of its aims: 'This is a book to read with, an experiment in critical reading. While writing it, I have always been thinking of literature as *read* by someone, as an active engagement between the reader and the printed page. My aim has been twofold: to demonstrate some methods of reading analysis and to use them in discovering designs of imaginative organization in particular

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poems, plays, and novels'. Central preoccupations such as 'Design in Imagery', or 'Design in Metaphor and Irony', with which the first part of the book is concerned, are discussed in analytic terms which are by now fairly familiar, though that in itself is nothing against them. Throughout the whole first section there is much sound observation on critical tactics, and some useful commentary on poems by Donne, Herbert, Keats, and Wordsworth. But there are certain qualifications to be urged. The choice of examples is sometimes questionable; why, for instance, should Mr. Brower waste his time on two undistinguished poems by Robert Frost and Marianne Moore? Some of the writing is rather tortuous and laborious, a fault admittedly not easy to avoid in the difficult task of trying to be both thorough and unambiguous; yet one feels that Mr. Brower might have spared us the complication of such terms as 'subject' and 'icon' to describe 'the two halves of a metaphor'. He confesses that he proposes them 'with not too much confidence'. In the same chapter he goes so far as to produce a diagram—'which I regard less solemnly than the reader perhaps supposes'—of the metaphorical structure of Herbert's 'The Windows'. The critics we are considering, I noted above, are concerned with the forging of a new, more precise critical technique. The use of the word 'technique' was deliberate. Obviously it is a danger signal. Although one may speak of critical 'tactics' or 'approach' to describe the extremely general means by which the critic goes about ordering his responses and making discriminations of relevance between them, there cannot be, properly speaking, any such thing as a *technique* of criticism. The excuse for insisting on so elementary a truth will, I think, be apparent later in this note. Mr. Brower is really no victim of the 'technique' fallacy. The flexibility with which he adapts himself to the different works he has under observation and the good sense of his comments on most of them are sufficient demonstration of this. Yet the danger of trying to erect criticism into a 'technique', complete with paraphernalia of terms and diagrams, is nevertheless there, despite the author's very apparent discomfort.

The second part of the book consists of chapters on *The Tempest*, Pope's Epistle IV, and three novels, together with a general chapter on *Integrity of Imagination*. If one feels that Mr. Brower's analysis of *The Tempest* is a trifle external, one must remember that his aims in this chapter, expressed at one point as an intention 'to show a continuity of analogy and a development of metaphor', are confessedly restricted. He is admirable on the ironic complexities of the Elizabeth-Darcy relationship in *Pride and Prejudice*, and has some excellent analysis of Pope's satire, showing how deeply rooted it is in the great Augustan positive commonplaces. He also writes well on *A Passage to India*, though I feel that he rather exaggerates the success with which, he holds, Mrs. Moore's experience in the cave is prepared and rendered.

In Shakespeare criticism, however, it is disconcerting when, at the opening of the chapter immediately following that on *The*

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Tempest, one comes to this: 'The best preparation for understanding *Mrs. Dalloway* is to read *The Tempest*, or *Cymbeline*, or, better still, *A Winter's Tale*. One might go further and say that in her singleness of vision and in her handling of words, Virgina Woolf has a Shakespearean imagination. If that sounds like nonsense—and it may—perhaps by the end of the chapter the reader will agree that it sounds "so like sense that it will do as well".' This reader, at any rate, has reached the end of the chapter without thinking the proposition one fraction less nonsensical than it first appeared. One begins to wonder whether an approach to a Shakespeare play that restricts itself to showing 'continuity of analogy and development of metaphor' is not merely limited, but capable of being positively misleading. Mr. Brower is often on the verge of tracing 'patterns' for their own sakes, and in choosing to write on *Mrs. Dalloway* he has given this tendency full rein. His exposition of the workings of the novel is sound enough; in a sense it *is* a closely-woven book. But to make such claims as he does for a novel so sentimental, so lacking in substance, in anything approaching living reality, does not seem defensible. 'This singleness in reception and expression, as evidenced in the metaphorical design', he tells us, 'is what we mean by integrity of imagination in Virginia Woolf'. An 'integrity of imagination' that has no reference to the seriousness, sanity and wholeness of a writer's feeling for life is not of much worth. And Shakespeare, after all, cannot be the great poet we have taken him to be if his 'metaphorical design' has no more central function, no more rootedness, than that of Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Unduly fascinated by the novel's 'technique'—to transfer the word from criticism to the object of criticism—Mr. Brower has confused mere accomplishment with genius.

If I have seemed to lay an unfair stress on this chapter, it is because I feel it to be the only serious blot on a book which, all qualifications urged, is admirable in design and execution. One only wishes that Mr. Brower might have chosen a novel so truly 'Shakespearean' as *The Scarlet Letter*—though the task would have been harder and the chapter less neat.

Modern Poetry and the Tradition sets out to show that significant modern poetry, far from wantonly breaking with the past, is rooted in a poetic tradition that had merely been temporarily obscured by the conventions of the nineteenth century. The only justification for pursuing a subject by now so well-worn, if the book were addressed to the mature reader, would be some new insight, some considered qualification and adjustment of what has been said elsewhere. Mr. Brooks breaks little fresh ground. His opening chapter, 'Metaphor and the Tradition', is concerned with defending the modern poet against the view represented by such books as Sparrow's *Sense and Poetry*, and with showing how the notion of the intrinsically 'poetic' grew up. The statement that 'the play of the intellect is not necessarily hostile to depth of emotion' is typical of the admirable but unadventurous conclusions

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one finds in this chapter. It would appear, then, that the book really is intended for the unconverted, for the reader who finds 'the modern English and American poets bewildering'. But even as a primer, perhaps more particularly as such, the book is open to severe criticism. Its most serious fault, a persistent simplification of important issues, is illustrated by the summary way in which Wordsworth, Coleridge, Johnson, Addison, and Housman are lumped together as illustrating or anticipating the 'poetic' point of view. It is not enough to suggest, as Mr. Brooks vaguely does, that there are certain distinctions between them; those distinctions must be *made*, and explicitly, if the reader is not be led astray. Large gestures, easy assumptions, and critical imprecisions, are all too characteristic of the book as a whole, Mr. Brower, we have remarked, works with fairly familiar terms and method, but he is nowhere content simply to assert, or, although he acknowledges indebtedness to other critics, to lean on their findings. His analyses are always first-hand and conscientious. Compared with him, Mr. Brooks evinces a radical superficiality, a disinclination or inability really to grapple with a question. In the chapter entitled 'Wit and High Seriousness', for instance, he quotes the first three stanzas of Habington's 'To Roses in the Bosom of Castara', and observes, justly, that the poem 'begins, as the title would suggest, by striking the note of conscious and artful gallantry appropriate to an occasional poem of exaggerated compliment'. He then concludes his examination of the poem by prefacing the final stanza with the unsupported comment that 'with the last stanza the poem has surely modulated into something else'. Now that may be perfectly true, but one has the right to expect some show of analysis, some attempt to define that 'something else'. For all the uncritical ease with which Mr. Brooks uses the term 'wit', one wonders whether he is able to recognize the quality at all, when he is capable of saying, in his final chapter, that Pope 'is not lacking in wit, but the wit has been relegated to satire and *vers de société* . . . . Where his wit is lacking—the "Elegy on an Unfortunate Lady"—he is a sentimentalist'. To say that of a poem which is above all a triumph of wit and a testimony to the prevalence of the Metaphysical line in Pope is to be guilty of extraordinary blindness and superficiality.

Mr. Brooks is more interesting and suggestive when dealing with modern poetry rather than with the tradition, though one feels that he has somewhat over-estimated the work of such writers as Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren, and has been unduly generous to the weaker side of Auden. The best chapter in the book, '*The Waste Land*: critique of the myth', has already appeared in this country in another context, and was commented on in the review of *Approaches to T. S. Eliot* in *Scrutiny* (Vol. XV, No. 1).

But the chapter on Yeats lays the author open to the charge of superficiality in a particularly damaging way. To speak, for instance, of 'the quality of self-irony in his (Yeats's) characterization of himself as a "monument of unageing intellect" ' is to confess that one has not understood 'Sailing to Byzantium'. Mr. Brooks seems

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reluctant to approach Yeats as a poet rather than as an amateur of hallucination. Of 'Byzantium' he tells us that 'we shall not understand the third stanza nor the finish fully unless we understand something of Yeats's theory of spirits', and proceeds to quote elaborate chapter and verse. If he is really right, one is tempted to reply, so much the worse for the poem. Mr. Brooks is concerned with defending Yeats's theories and systems—he subtitles the chapter 'Yeats: the poet as myth-maker',—but the task evidently gave him no little embarrassment. At the end of the chapter, indeed, it forces him into a quite startling piece of legerdemain. Yeats's 'myth', he tells us, in whatever sense it may not be true, 'is imaginatively true, and if most people will take this to mean that it is after all trivial, this merely shows in what respect the age holds the imagination'. Such faulty reasoning, to give it a charitable description, just will not do. There are as many ways in which the phrase 'imaginatively true' may be applied as there are types of 'imagination'. If 'most people' decide that the 'system' of Yeats is a puffed-up prodigy with pretensions and fulminations that the healthy mind cannot accept, it is not owing to any irreverent feelings towards an abstraction termed 'the imagination', but rather to an instinctive revolt against this specific emanation of the particular imagination of Yeats. To many people the best poems of Yeats register a precarious success achieved in spite of rather than because of the 'system'.

Mr. Brooks's essay, along with other studies elsewhere available, such as Mr. Wilson's chapter from *Axel's Castle* and the section on Yeats in *New Bearings*, is included in *The Permanence of Yeats*, one of those large compilations of which the last few years have witnessed in the United States a veritable mushroom growth. Of the essays not readily available in other forms to the English reader, it may be said that the majority exhibit the same kind of perplexity and embarrassment to be found in Mr. Brooks. The great preoccupation is the difficulty of overcoming the obstacle of the 'system' or 'myth'. If Mr. Brooks thinks that we can and should swallow it whole for the sake of the poetry, Mr. Blackmur is not prepared to go that far, but feels nevertheless that the reader must in some way or other come to terms with it if he is to take the poetry at all seriously. Mr. Ransom, comparing Yeats's use of his system with Eliot's use of Christianity, argues that if we are able to accept the poetic embodiment of the latter without doctrinal assent, we should be able to do the same with the former. A poet who needs, or seems to need, 'justification' of this kind, is plainly both a special case and a dangerous one, capable of catching the critic thoroughly off his guard. Indeed, it would be possible, if one wished to be really disrespectful, to construct from this book a very pretty *sottisier* of critical irresponsibilities perpetrated by educated men led astray by the moonlit enchantment of their subject. Mr. Ransom, for example, observing that 'There must have been a few ages in which unofficial poetry has kept religion alive if not flourishing during the weakness or the collapse of the establishments',

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finds that 'After all, Yeats's accomplishment in this respect is of the same kind as Shakespeare's though it is far less diffuse and more coherent'. But to resist the temptation to go further: Mr. Blackmur, in one of the more substantial essays, has come far more closely to grips with the problem of the 'system' than Mr. Brooks has seen fit to do. Far from trying to pass it off simply by claiming that it is 'imaginatively true', he is most explicit about one way in which it may be said to be imaginatively *untrue*. Speaking of the 'radical defects of magic as a tool for poetry', he observes that the poet who makes use of it 'is, in fact, in much the same position that Dante would have been had he had to construct his Christian doctrine while he was composing *The Divine Comedy*: an impossible labour . . . . Christianity has an objective form, whatever the mysteries at its heart and its termini, in which all the phenomena of human life may find place and meaning. Magic is none of these things for any large fraction of contemporary society'. That, I think it will be agreed, is a sufficient answer to Mr. Brooks, and also a fundamental objection to Mr. Ransom's central position. A distinction, obviously, must be made between the relatively 'public' symbols used by Mr. Eliot, however unusual and special the significance they may take on in the poem, and such decidedly 'private' ones as those of Yeats. Mr. Blackmur feels, nevertheless, that despite all this one must, in order to read the poetry, either undergo a 'secular conversion' by interpreting Yeats's 'system' in Freudian terms, or, preferably, 'search out the prose parallels and reconstruct the symbols he uses on their own terms in order to come on the emotional reality, if it is there, actually in the poems—when the machinery may be dispensed with'. One may pause to inquire why the machinery could not be dispensed with from the beginning, if the poem is a work of art and thus itself explains why it should be 'so and not otherwise'. But when Mr. Blackmur, 'to spur the reader, or inadvertently to dismay him', presents 'a few examples of the sort of reconstructive labour he will have to do and the sort of imaginative assent he may have to attempt in order to enter or dismiss the body of the poems', one cannot help gasping, and wondering why Mr. Blackmur ever bothered to write his essay, the situation being as bad as that! He certainly goes on to clarify and expand, but one may all the same locate here a symptom of the prevailing tendency of this volume: a marked preference for elucidation as opposed to criticism. Few of the critics are disposed to approach Yeats as a poet rather than as a spellbinder or as some kind of culture-hero. There are some exceptions. Mr. Allen Tate calls admirably for an analysis of 'Byzantium' 'in which no special knowledge is used', though his own essay does not go very far in that direction. Mr. Arthur Mizener deserves honorable mention for his good sense and hygienic scepticism. The remainder of the essays include contributions from Mr. Kenneth Burke, who is interested in the One and the Many, Mr. Eric Bentley, Mr. Auden, and Mr. Eliot. Mr. Eliot's contribution, the First Annual Yeats Lecture, delivered at Dublin in 1940, is a high-sounding utterance, whose

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extraordinarily guarded manner and cautiously general terms suggest that it was written with neither much enjoyment nor much conviction.

'An age of formalist criticism', say the editors, 'has chosen, surprisingly, to deal with Yeats as a problem in cultural values'. I quote that less for the idea expressed than for the sake of the epithet 'formalist', so confidently used to designate the prevailing critical tendencies of our time—perhaps because other elements, as one may put it, have made of the word a term of abuse. The word appears again in the introduction to *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction*, though Mr. Aldridge is not quite so sweeping. He admits the existence of another major category of modern criticism, confessing that he is 'inclined to leave the naturalistic and more directly experiential novel to critics whose interests are more in sociology than in art, more in the man than in the artist'. The 'more directly experiential novel', incidentally, comprehends the works of Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Crane, Anderson, Lawrence, Wolfe, Dreiser, and Farrell. Little comment is necessary, the vicious pigeon-holing habit that blandly divides critics into the more and less 'formalist', that advances 'more directly experiential' as a valid distinction, and that permits the complacent fitting of Lawrence into such a company being only too self-illuminating. (This is the place to remark that as opposed to four contributions on Joyce there is only one on Lawrence, and that a bad one.) The same departmentalizing tendency will be apparent from a glance at the Contents. Part I is entitled 'The Technique of Fiction'. Part II 'Critiques: studies in the method of meaning', and Part III, 'The Mode of the Novelist', is subdivided under such headings as 'Experience and the Personal Element', 'Fantasy', 'Vision and Sensibility', and that term so indispensable to modern American critics, 'Myth'. The volume, in fact, is nothing less than a textbook for acquiring what may be called a technique for studying another technique. Mr. Aldridge has explicitly designed it to 'meet the needs of the increasing number of serious students who are interested in fiction as an art rather than as a model, and who may be expected to be concerned with the element which most clearly distinguishes it as an art, its technique or form'. If one detected in Mr. Brower a tendency at times to be unduly interested in 'form' for its own sake, as in the Virginia Woolf chapter, or to erect criticism into something like a 'technique', one is almost tempted to dismiss those lapses as too trivial to be mentioned when compared with the bias and apparatus of the majority of the essays and extracts in this anthology. The tragedy is that these critics are so convinced of doing the right thing, of being in the vanguard of the enlightenment. Mr. Brower's analysis of *The Tempest*, we noted, was perhaps 'a trifle external', but such a description seems barely justified after one has read Mr. Mark Schorer's 'Fiction and the "Analogical Matrix".' *Persuasion*, we are told, 'is a novel of courtship and marriage with a patina of sentimental scruple and moral punctilio and a stylistic base derived from commerce and property, the

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counting house and the inherited estate', and we are given abundant illustration of how this 'stylistic base' is supposed to operate: 'Time is *divided*, troubles *multiply*, weeks are *calculated*, and even a woman's prettiness is *reckoned*', and so on. Now Mr. Schorer may well be making a relevant point in drawing attention to this peculiarity of the novel's vocabulary; it may well be organic and functional in the way he suggests. The trouble is that he rests content with the mere listing of words that seem to him to belong to this vocabulary of 'commerce and property '—and more often than not their inclusion under such a head is highly dubious—without that kind of sensitive and discriminating examination of the larger context which could alone lend support to his argument. I cannot believe, for example, that to observe that 'Anne "*ventured* to recommend a larger *allowance* of prose" in Captain Benwick's "daily study" ' is to say anything at all relevant to the issue. If one has a rooted determination to trace 'patterns' in this way, one may play the same game with any passage of sufficient length picked at random from the daily press. A proper examination of the novel along such lines would have to involve finding out whether metaphors that are dead to-day were in fact so in Jane Austen's time, and would be a piece of sociological as well as linguistic historical research.

As in the case of *The Permanence of Yeats*, I pass over those contributions that are otherwise available in this country and with which the reader will already be familiar. Briefly to comment on some of the remainder, Mr. Joseph Frank's 'Spatial Form in the Modern Novel' starts with Flaubert and Joyce, broods for a while over Proust, and for *piéce de résistance* concludes with an examination of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*. Mr. Francis Fergusson's 'D. H. Lawrence's Sensibility' is a patronizing piece of work, with an insidiously poised air of having much to say on both sides. Taking the familiar line that Lawrence was a genius but only an artist by fits and starts, he concludes that 'he is in the tradition of romantic writers whose sensibility is more important than their works'. Morton Dauwen Zabel has a decent but unadventurous essay on Conrad, while Ray B. West Jr., writing on Katherine Anne Porter's *Flowering Judas*, is moved to draw diagrams of a picturesque quality far surpassing Mr. Brower's single tentative effort. The two contributions by Mr. Philip Rahv, on the other hand, 'The Cult of Experience in American Writing', and 'Notes on the Decline of Naturalism', command both attention and respect. Taken with the seriousness they deserve, they make the preoccupations of most of the other writers look irrelevant, futile, and even frivolous. There is in them much to disagree with, and a great deal to question, but at least Mr. Rahv is a real critic, who regards literature as part of the serious business of living and not as a kind of superior crossword puzzle for exercizing the jaded sensibility.

These five books have arranged themselves in a more or less descending order of value, but I am not sure whether, if sheer fascination be the criterion, sheer fascination at the spectacle of

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what an Associate Professor of Classics, guardian of the Humanities, can do, Mr. Donald Sutherland's *Gertrude Stein: a Biography of her Work* ought not to head the list. Mr. Sutherland is evidently in thorough command of his subject and writes with real authority. He also writes with what can only be described as a singular charm, as the very opening sentence will show: 'This will be to explain as much as I understand of what Gertrude Stein did in writing'. At times this charm becomes pervasive to the point of real syntactical obscurity, but on the whole Mr. Sutherland's review of Gertrude Stein's intellectual background and subsequent development is admirably clear. If one really wishes to make a claim for Miss Stein as a writer of major status, this book will give one all the necessary material. Its explanations and justifications could be, for the right reader, extremely plausible. The wrong reader, on the other hand, will not be so sure as Mr. Sutherland that *'comprendre, c'est tout pardonner'*. Throughout the book he draws numerous parallels between Gertrude Stein and Picasso, not to mention other painters,—that she herself often did the same is beside the point—and seems to assume that because a device succeeds in a painting or drawing its verbal equivalent must be equally felicitous. Composers as well as painters make similar appearances in Mr. Sutherland's pages. One may ask what he can really be said to have meant in the following: 'Her art like that of Henry James or that of Mozart was a thoroughly intellectual and secular art, essentially, and in the great sense, comic'. One could easily fill a page with quotations of that kind, to which, incidentally, could be added not a few from Mr. Aldridge's volume. (Far be it from me to prescribe a study of *Laokoon* for all aspiring literary critics, but I cannot help wondering whether some of the elementary distinctions Lessing makes in his blundering way are not worth bearing in mind. It is all too easy for the unwary to fall into a blurring and critically disabling dilettantism.) From time to time Mr. Sutherland seems to grow aware that the wrong reader is not likely to be altogether convinced by his clever arguments, and has recourse to a kind of rhetoric, neatly implying weakness in his opponents: 'I think one has to like freedom in order to like Gertrude Stein's work at all. One has to want a work to be itself, on its own, and not on the tolerance or justification of philosophy, history, journalism, economics, or whatever, even aesthetics. As one presumably wants to be oneself'. By including 'aesthetics' in his list, he apparently hopes to protect himself against suspicions of harbouring a taste for Art for Art's Sake, without realizing that he is in fact making claims for that very thing, in the thin disguise of Stein for Stein's Sake. And if his elaborately worked-out justification of Miss Stein be not a sophisticated exercise in practical 'aesthetics', I do not see what it can be called. The passage, of course, rhetorical considerations apart, in its insistence on the isolation, the independence of Gertrude Stein's works, is central to the argument of the book. It is to Mr. Sutherland's credit that he leaves one in no doubt as to what she was doing, even though one's opinion of the

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value of her activities may be very different from his. It would not be easy, after reading the following, to dismiss *Tender Buttons* as a meaningless game: 'But by rejecting her knowledge of types, Gertrude Stein was faced with each experience as a unique thing, with even its importance unprejudiced, as simply different. It is logical enough that anything is the same as something else by some category or other, but it is also unique, by being both the only thing in its space at the time and the only thing before the mind if the mind attends to it'. One is immediately, however, prompted to question the real possibility of the kind of 'attention' that keeps one thing only before the mind, its healthiness if it be possible, and, more particularly, the healthiness of the sensibility that finds it desirable. Although it is at the opposite pole from undisciplined fantasy, which is commonly taken to be the nearest stage to insanity, it would seem to me to be hardly less unhealthy and prejudicial to the proper spontaneous functioning of the consciousness. At best it could only lead to dullness and narrowness of response. I am not questioning the authority and intelligence of Gertrude Stein's teachers, and am not qualified to discuss the value or importance of the experiments in which she took part at the Harvard Psychological Laboratory. I am not even particularly concerned here with what she made of her intellectual education when she turned to writing. What does interest me is Mr. Sutherland's attitude, the kind of assumption he makes, and the type of objection he does not take into account. Still, he does allow for certain objections: 'We can perfectly feel that if all history and all theology and all science led inexorably to *Tender Buttons* the book still would not be our dish. The question really is, is an isolated thing and a disconnected thing our kind of thing?' The argument he uses to show that it is indeed 'our kind of thing' is most valuably revealing. He observes that 'in the second World War the amount of logistics arranged for the fighting was immense, but the actual simple fighting was done with little if any feeling of connection to or dependence on the organization . . . . The disconnection of bombing planes, of artillery, of tanks, from any but the most tenuous connection with their objectives or a general situation, was vivid enough. And the trench was superseded by the foxhole. Given that there was a war, I think most of us liked it to be that way. In any case it all goes to show that a disconnected and isolated thing can be a natural pleasure to us'. Perhaps it would be as well to refrain from comment on that passage until it has been read in juxtaposition with another, from the concluding chapter: 'She seriously created, in the midst of our world, which was falling away under habits and memories and mechanisms of words and ideas, a new reality. The elements of that reality were implicit in the life of the twentieth century—the intense isolation of anyone and anything, the simple gratuity of existence, the fantastic inventiveness, and the all but total lack of memory—but it was Gertrude Stein who made that implicit reality most distinct and positive and completely real to the reading mind, as Picasso made it clear to the eye'. From those two passages

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one may deduce what an Associate Professor of Classics, in a book published by a prominent university press, thinks about the function and place of literature at the present time. Writer and reader alike must bow to the worst aspects of modern civilization, war included, in a completely uncritical frame of mind, and what is most outrageous, enjoy the experience.

Mr. Sutherland, fortunately, is an extreme case, at any rate among the critics we have been considering, though his helpless attitude does link up with the failure of most of the contributors to Mr. Aldridge's volume to show exactly *why* the novelists they discuss are important, important to the responsible human being. And from there it is a short step to the evasiveness and question-begging of the majority of the Yeats critics, and the inertia of Mr. Brooks's relatively decent but unsatisfactory book. It is, of course, dangerous to generalize on the basis of a mere handful of books, though the representation of critics in the two compilations alone is wide enough. Remembering this, however, and even allowing for the possibility that certain distinguished critics may have been omitted and that those who are included may in some cases be badly represented, I think we may with some justice conclude that the situation is not an encouraging one. The total impression produced by the preoccupation with 'form', the ambition to turn criticism into a 'technique', the taste for elucidation and pattern-tracing rather than value-judgment, is that of a new academic spirit no less potent than the old, with seemingly infinite possibilities of a strangling proliferation as time goes on. One is struck, when perusing the two compilations, by the indiscriminate way in which the one or two distinguished contributions are bundled together with the many bad ones, as though there were no essential differences of quality and kind between them. They are all, one gathers, to be regarded with equal seriousness as 'modern' criticism. It is significant that Joyce should be so prominent a figure in Mr. Aldridge's volume, that Proust's name should appear so often in the same book, as well as in Mr. Sutherland's study, and that Yeats should receive a whole volume to himself. One is not saying anything against those writers when one remarks that they are the most temptingly obvious vehicles for those whose interests lie in the direction of elucidation, ingenious 'explication'. That there should be an audience intellectually hungry for that kind of thing, and earnestly bent on devouring the lot, good and bad alike, is a more worrying consideration. Literature, it would appear, is a luxury-commodity, a superior intellectual stimulus, with little if any reference to the serious interests and problems of living. It has, in fact, no central function, but is simply something to be 'studied'.

ROBIN MAYHEAD.

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EMILY DICKINSON

EMILY DICKINSON. By Richard Chase (Methuen & Co., Ltd. 16/-).

Its latest volume does nothing to raise the pedestrian level of the American Men of Letters Series. Most strikingly, the book is far too long. This may be the consequence of drawing out the material to the required volume length, but if so, Mr. Chase's talent for interminable discursion happily serves his purpose. And yet, in his consideration of Emily Dickinson's poems themselves, he makes quick work of what should, surely, be his main concern: to separate the very small body of valuable poetry from the preponderant mass of inferior, or down-right bad, verse; to identify the nature of her originality; and to evaluate her success. But at this very point, Mr. Chase makes his short-cuts by way of some surprising assumptions. On the first page of his book he asserts: 'She stands, perhaps with Whitman, at the top of the American achievement in poetry, and . . . she is the greatest of women poets'. He supports this assertion simply by claiming universal agreement, adding that the critic is 'relieved of the task of promoting his poet to a higher position in public favour'. I had supposed the Dickinson craze had ended several years ago, that her limitations were recognized, and that, rather, the critic was relieved of the task of demoting his subject to her minor if (on the strength of a few poems) secure position in literature.

True, Mr. Chase grants that 'to my ear at least only a dozen or two [of her poems] urge one to use the word "great",' adding that it doesn't matter if readers 'agree on the exact number of her poems which they wish to call great'. No, I shouldn't suppose, either, that it was a matter of numerical allowance to indiscriminate enthusiasm, and Emily Dickinson's work is so remarkably uneven that a critic might, without undue presumption, suggest which few poems are worth the reader's attention. And Mr. Chase does, in a way, commit himself: he outlines a modest and, on the whole, persuasive, 'anthology' of his own favourites. Such welcome particularity, however, confined as it is to a few pages, is muffled by the woollen weight of much of his criticism. The trouble seems to be that he takes his subject too seriously—or perhaps too *solemnly* is the descriptive phrase. For having accorded Emily Dickinson an exalted importance, he metes out to her the attention due to her position, employing all the accredited diagnostics from semantics to Freudian analysis. Her importance would seem to be in proportion to her difficulty, and 'it remains true that we cannot see her work very clearly until we perceive that her best and most characteristic poems proliferate from one centre of energy'. Actually, Mr. Chase's little anthology belies this threat of complexity; those he chooses as her most successful poems are essentially simple and self-contained. Of course, she is frequently obscure, and Mr. Chase himself succinctly accounts for it (but one of the

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exasperating things about this book is the author's refusal to profit from his own perspicacity). He writes: 'It is clear that, however memorable some of her phrases are, she had an exaggerated idea of what could be accomplished merely by tinkering with syntax'. The difficulty is verbal, but the poetry is, if anything, *too* simple, which is the reason, as much as her persistent idiomatic idiosyncrasy, why any extensive reading of Emily Dickinson is so monotonous.

But for the purpose of extending what might have been a long essay into a substantial book, Mr. Chase has more original techniques than laboriously solving honorific difficulties. There is, for example, his habit of free association: he can detour into such parentheses as a comment on her 'curiously Joycean redundancy', or he will note similarities in temperament between the Emilys Dickinson and Brontë, or he will remark of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti: 'There are several circumstances in their lives which might have recommended to each an interest in the other'—notably, both were born in December, 1830. Again, 'there are limits to the utility of comparing Emily Dickinson with Shakespeare!'—all parallels none the less worth constructing, it seems, because they end immediately in blind alleys.

And even more ingenious is the device of disavowal: guarding against misconceptions that would never occur to readers with less restless imaginations. Emily Dickinson 'was entirely proof against the fate of projecting her personal neurotic difficulties into political form, as do the Olive Chancellors of the world'. Or, in another place, there 'is no evidence that she developed a dialectic of contraries'. Again (no connection with the preceding): 'This does not mean . . . that she produced a philosophy of tensions'. Finally (not to labour the point), Mr. Chase can hint ominously at further fields for fruitful scholarship, as when, after an understandably cursory glance at her versification, he remarks: 'The final publication of a variorum edition may show her to have been more of a technician than she now seems'.

What little the biographical chapters add to already available information on the poet's life frequently amounts to mere conjecture based on Emily Dickinson's cryptic patterings—usually in her letters. For example, 'We catch the palpable sense that extremities have been reached by 1863 from the following words'—and he quotes a specimen of the spooky dramatics with which the woman frequently diverted herself. But 'this was indeed a period in which just such an extreme question as the question of one's sanity came up'. Well, perhaps—and who's to deny it? Not, in any case, on the tenuous evidence presented.

Nevertheless, this is incomparably the best part of the book. The sketch of Emily Dickinson's life (1830-1886), but particularly of her cultural and social background in a New England college town engages more profitably Mr. Chase's interests and talents. He writes here directly and easily, with an informed sympathy for his subject and a critical control of his material. He has accumulated

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much valuable evidence to support his account of the provincial decadence of two 'phenomena: New England Puritanism and Romanticism', a culture 'susceptible to a thoroughly vulgarized sentimentality'. If he had only, we note regretfully, followed this so obvious bent, if he had related more explicitly to this background characteristics of Emily Dickinson's poetry—the aphorisms, the taste for abstractions, the sentimentality, the extravagance, the 'straining after ecstatic release and a failure to achieve it', the grotesque humour—then what a valuable chapter he could have written in the history of American intellectual life. But, of course, that would have been another book—not, certainly, a semi-official celebration of 'the greatest of women poets'.

JOHN FARRELLY.

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION IN PRIMITIVE SOCIETY. *A. R. Radcliffe-Browne* (*Cohen and West*, 21/-).

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY. *E. E. Evans-Pritchard* (*Cohen and West*, 8/6).

The publication within a year of each other of books of a general or theoretical nature by the Emeritus and actual Professors of Social Anthropology at Oxford is an event in itself. Its importance is increased by Professor Evans-Pritchard's earlier publication in MAN which brought into the open certain important differences as to theory and approach which exist between him and the majority of social anthropologists in this country. However, the different purposes of the two books do not allow of a full examination of this divergence. Professor Radcliffe-Browne's work is a collection of essays published at different times since 1924. It is written chiefly for specialists and includes examples of the detailed analysis of social facts which has justified the permanent position he holds in the history of the subject. Evans-Pritchard's book is a publication of recent broadcast lectures which in turn were based upon an introductory course given to Colonial Cadets in Oxford.

The general public will be more interested in the last five chapters of the former book which are of a theoretical nature. It is to these chapters that the latter book, modest as it is, can be said to be complementary, suggesting answers to questions which inevitably arise in them. They deal respectively with religion, the concepts of social function and social structure, social sanctions and primitive law. Generally speaking, the dominating idea is that of the social organism, an analogy popularised by Spencer. The danger of the word organism is that it encourages those who use it to think less in terms of a useful comparison and more in terms of actual identity with natural organisms. Admittedly the various parts of society work together to make the society what it is but

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these are contingent relations. Social phenomena can be studied in their individuality and apart from any relations which they may maintain amongst themselves. The aim is to understand the society as a whole and only if one is thinking of a natural organism maintaining its life does one concentrate exclusively on the relations between parts which are considered as helping it do so. An example of what happens when the thinker is influenced by this 'analogy' occurs in Radcliffe-Browne's chapter on Religion. The argument is as follows: primitive religions are 'systems of erroneous and illusory beliefs', while other anthropologists have been concerned with the problem of how they ever came to be accepted, Radcliffe-Browne thinks that they can be really understood if their social function, 'the contribution that they make to the formation and maintenance of social order', is studied, and this regardless of the 'truth or falsity' of such religions. He finds in fact that religious rites 'have a specific social function when, and to the extent that, they have for their effect to regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another sentiments upon which the constitution of the society depends'. The suggestion that the understanding of a primitive religion is limited to this is so strong that it amounts to a positive statement. It is difficult to see why the question of 'truth or falsity' should be raised at all when the syntax of a religion can be studied in itself, and a fuller understanding reached than any observations of its peripheral contacts with other institutions will provide. That it should be considered relevant is significantly disastrous. 'We do not believe' he says 'that the rain-making rites of savage tribes really produce rain'. Recent research has shown that sacrifice associated with a desire for rain is not viewed by Radcliffe-Browne and the savage officiant in radically different ways. Neither expects the rain to fall as a necessary result of the sacrifice. The former is perhaps the more naïve in that he conceives such a transaction at all. For the savage the two events are connected with his view of the universe, the nature of rain to fall and the nature of man to sacrifice. It might be argued here that we criticize Radcliffe-Browne for not doing what he never intended to do. He is merely concerned with the way in which religious rites have a 'specific social function'. However those who read the whole chapter will see the bias which is suggested in the passages I have quoted. It has for its effect the dismissal of facts which are not seen to have a function in the sense that this latter term is understood.

Social anthropology for Radcliffe-Browne is a natural science and he defines natural science as 'the systematic investigation of the structure of the universe as it is revealed to us through our senses'. (p. 190). This ambiguous definition seems to defeat itself. Society is not evident to the senses and therefore if that part of the universe which is so evident is the sphere of the natural sciences, social anthropology cannot be one of them; on the other hand, 'structure' being an abstraction, cannot be said to be the immediate datum of sense experience. This robust certainty is alien to the

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theoreticians of modern science and is more characteristic of the last century.

The scientific attitudes which, in its earlier stages, were invaluable in bringing precision to social anthropology, in making it a discipline, bring with them questionable assumptions which hamper profitable discussion by ruling certain vital aspects of social life out of court.

Various anthropologists, chiefly in America, have been advancing doubts on this subject but Professor Evans-Pritchard's position is distinctive in that it is quite firmly related to the tradition of anthropology in this country which owes its form to the consistent guidance of Radcliffe-Browne, over a period of thirty years. It cannot be seen as a break-away but as a readjustment. While he recognizes societies as systems, he refuses to see them as natural systems:

> 'One has a right, I think, to ask those who assert that the aim of social anthropology is to formulate sociological laws similar to the laws formulated by natural scientists to produce formulations which resemble what are called laws in these sciences. Up to the present nothing . . . has been adduced—only rather naïve deterministic, teleological, and pragmatic assertions'. (p. 57).

In his opinion, societies are moral or symbolic systems to be studied ideally through time. Their history is essential to a proper understanding of them, and it is this understanding which is, after all, the purpose of social anthropology.

To many readers these propositions may seem obvious. It may seem strange that a view of social anthropology as a natural science was ever considered a profitable one. The present disagreement is rendered intelligible by the history of thought in the last century and in turn throws light on the strange infatuations of that era. The spirit of usurpation and arrogance which inspired what should be distinct sciences is typified by the thought of Comte and it is to him that sociology owes its name. In this sphere the word 'science' (in the sense that philosophy is a science) has lost its meaning; it can only be reclaimed when its connection with particular and slightly outmoded notions has been severed.

D. F. Pocock.

CORRECTION: In the review of W. H. Clemen's *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (*Scrutiny*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3) there was a reference to an essay on *Coriolanus* by Mr. Wilson Knight in *The Wheel of Fire*. The essay appears, of course, in *The Imperial Theme*. [By an oversight this correction was omitted from the last issue.]

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